

A Synchronous Process:
Musicians' Labor and Identity as Television Industry Practice

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Abstract

A Synchronous Process: Musicians' Labor as Television Industry Practice provides a contemporary history of musicians' contributions to the medium. It pays particular attention to how musical and televisual genres shape these convergent relations and properties in order to understand such partnerships' industrial impact and their cultural reverberations. Thus, it is concerned with music's function as a shared resource between the television and music industries, as well as how identity ascribes value to it in relation to the professionals whose work is being deployed. *A Synchronous Process* applies textual analysis, trade discourse, professionals' social media usage, industry reports, and interviews to a series of case studies in broadcast and cable television that are organized by musicians' work in composing, booking, placement, and reuse across distinct musical and televisual genres.

This dissertation mobilizes the word “synchronization” in order to claim that music is both a product of industrial synchronization and an expression of struggle between the television and music industries' asynchronous labor practices. It also avers that such utterances matter to the audiences hailed by such compositional, performance, and placement decisions, and to the professionals whose music accompanies television programs. Musicians' contributions to the medium have historically benefitted the television industry, which has made musicians an attractive—if at times peripheral or expendable—feature of its landscape. Thus, this is a dissertation about how music's mediation becomes a site of struggle for professional recognition within industrial practice. It focuses specifically on the people who bring music to television within the historical context of industrial convergence and its reorganization of the television and music industries from the advent of cable television to the technological and programming shifts away from appointment viewing and mass audience formation that would come to define the

post-network era. The first section considers the ways in which hegemonic definitions of rock masculinity circulated on the big four broadcast networks from the early 1980s through the late 2000s through original music and live performance, with cultural difference around identity and genre coming to bear upon late-night programming during the late 2000s. The second section analyzes the placement and reuse of recordings from female indie rock artists for teen melodramas and pop stars for competition-based reality programming on Viacom-owned cable channels that specialize in music and lifestyle branding throughout the 2000s and into the first half of the 2010s. At stake in this project is a richer understanding of the labor responsible for mediating music for television and the claims to authorship and identification that come with synthesizing new cultural and industrial relationships between musical and televisual properties.

Acknowledgements

As a kid, I didn't think a movie was over until after I watched the end credits. Similarly, when I found popular music during adolescence and was altered by the sounds of women pushing the limits of their voices, synthesizers, samplers, and amplifiers, I believed I couldn't conclusively say I listened to an album until after I read the liner notes. Such an early interest in the politics of attribution certainly established my scholarly preoccupation with how the media industries accredit and value work, particularly when it is performed by musicians. And as an industry studies scholar who considers work through the critical lens of intersectional feminism, I believe in citation's transformative potential and that we must always think critically about whose words we draw upon and why. Therefore, this dissertation results from its orientation toward various people and how their words—raised to clarify, to object, to commiserate, and to encourage further inquiry—shaped its final form, however much it is still in the middle of its becoming.

I'd first like to acknowledge my advisor, Derek Johnson. This is the first dissertation he oversaw as a faculty member in the Communication Arts department—often while contending with many other obstacles, but always with an equal measure of skepticism and grace toward my project—and I hope it lives up to the perceptive, rigorous, principled work he continues to bring to the field. I'm not sure if this dissertation is an accurate reflection of what I learned from Derek about how to hypothesize, research, challenge primary and secondary sources, write, and revise, but hopefully the book that may follow from it will create a better mirror. The rest of the committee made distinct contributions as well. Jeremy Morris is a positive force that always bends toward goodness and possibility. As the Yoda of UW-Madison's Media and Cultural Studies program, the forest and the trees Jonathan Gray at once can nourish. Jeff Smith came in right at the last minute, and just in time. Finally, Mary Kearney—my former thesis advisor and

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Like many histories, this is a project about absence and the ways in which interruption, silence, and loss shape our understanding of the past as a series of overlapping moments, missed opportunities, and inconsistent durations that we try to form into a coherent narrative in the present as a way to make sense of the passage of time. Therefore, I would like to honor the four people whose sudden departures were deeply felt during the writing and research of this project: my stepbrother Daniel Walker, my friend Esme Barrera, my grandmother Mildred Larson, and my father John Vesey. Like many works of cultural studies, this is also a project about collaboration and coalition-building. So I'd like to acknowledge the children of family members and friends who came into the world during its devising, especially my nephews Max and Chance Thalken and Noah and Will Vandiver and my niece Joy Vandiver. And like many dissertations, this one was completed amid the intensities of various external pressures.

Foremost, the last chapter, conclusion, and final rounds of revisions were completed under the fog of my mother Mariana Walker's cancer diagnosis. No one has offered a better model for strength and critical fierceness than her, except maybe her sister Anna-Marie Bowlin. Also, she did not want me to come to Houston until after I filed this thing; I write because she fights.

Finally, I dedicate this project to my best friend and partner, Chi Chi Thalken. If a dissertation is like a debut album in that it takes the author her whole life to write it, then this project follows from that sparsely attended TV on the Radio show we caught at Emos in late 2003 and the easy walk back to your car that forged a new path; the times we spent debating the merits of *The O.C.*'s soundtrack over pizza in our college apartments; the family you welcomed

me into; and all of the concerts, albums, memoirs, documentaries, merch, mixes, trivia wins, and minor philosophical disputes we've accumulated in our time together. I drew a lot of strength from your belief in this project, especially when I didn't. Hopefully completing and sharing it demonstrates how I've tried to apply your patience and conviction to my work. To borrow from Stevie: "Without despair we will share and the joys of caring will not be replaced/What has been must never end, and with the strength we have won't be erased." Thanks, dude.

Introduction
Coordinated Efforts

Midway through the fifth season of HBO's *Girls*, one member of the series' central quartet gets "the call."¹ While attending a play based on Kitty Genovese's murder, burgeoning singer-songwriter Marnie (Allison Williams) half-heartedly consoles her friend Hannah (Lena Dunham, the show's creator), who suspects that Adam, a member of the play's ensemble and her ex-boyfriend (Adam Driver), is sleeping with her best friend Jessa (Jemima Kirke). Marnie's estranged husband Desi (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) interrupts their side conversation to notify her that music supervisor Alex Patsavas is interested in working with their band.

Desi: Marni, we got the call.

Marnie: What?

Desi: Alex Patsavas.

Marnie: Alex Patsavas? Alex Patsavas. Alex Patsavas?!

Desi: Yeah, man.

Hannah: Who the fuck is Alex Patsavas?

Marnie: Hannah, pick up a newspaper. She does all the music on *Grey's Anatomy*.

Desi: Well let's not minimize, Marn. She also fucking killed it on *Twilight*--

Marnie and Desi: *Gossip Girl*, *O.C.*....

Desi: I mean, she's like ... pffff.

Marnie: What does she want?

Desi: What she wants, what she wants is to use "Matter of Waiting" on *Grey's [Anatomy]*. They say it's for a huge fucking scene. Somebody fucking dies, Marn.

Marnie: Who dies?

¹ "Hello Kitty," *Girls*, Season 5, Episode 7, April 3, 2016.

Desi: They're not going to tell me that, but it's a principal for sure.

Marnie: A principal?

Desi: Yes. It could even be montage. I don't know. But I could see that, you know?

Marnie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I could totally see that.

Desi: This is the real deal. I talked to Perkus from the label. He said we have to ride the wave. We have to fucking tour the shit out of this song. This is our moment.

In the context of the season's larger narrative arc, this scene continues a running subplot concerning Marnie's and Desi's struggle to establish themselves as recording artists that began to develop at the end of *Girls*' third season.² Yet this small moment represents musicians' willingness to seize upon the television industry's interest, however tentative or superficial, as professional scaffolding for their own careers. Despite certain performers', critics', and fans' rhetorical overtures toward artistic integrity and vague but impassioned aspersions against "selling out," particularly within rock-oriented subcultures, such enterprising has always contributed to a musician's commercial longevity on the road, in the studio, across independent- and corporate-funded distribution systems, and within various professional networks.

Marnie's and Desi's enthusiasm toward the prospect of working with Patsavas demonstrates musicians' drive to contribute to the television industry in multiple ways. First, the duo refine their self-conscious, precious strain of folk music—supposedly a byproduct of their love, though the show often deploys their music as a satirical comment on the couple's narcissism³ and their Greenpoint neighborhood's hipster affectations⁴—by performing at open mics and uploading self-recorded demos to SoundCloud without representation in the hopes that

² "I Saw You," *Girls*, Season 3, Episode 11, March 16, 2014.

³ Perhaps the hipster musician equivalent to making love in front of a mirror, season four's "Sit-In" includes a brief depiction of the pair having sex in Marnie's hallway while streaming their music from her laptop.

⁴ In "Close-Up," Desi and Marnie discuss their setlist for a meeting with an interested record label and debate about whether "Song for Marcus Garvey," "Oaxaca Blues," and "Kokopelli Shellie" best represent their catalogue.

they will be snatched up by the music industries' claw machine as an A&R representative's next passion project.⁵ Despite living in Brooklyn, a New York borough that has become prohibitively expensive during the 2000s due to gentrification and creative class migration, the pair can wait indefinitely for such professional recognition as a struggling actor and a former gallery assistant because of their shared white upper-middle-class background, identity markers that are frequently shared with real musicians associated with their chosen genre, indie rock.⁶ Their SoundCloud page does eventually capture a small record label's interest at the beginning of season four.⁷ Upon signing they immediately agree to their contract's stipulations for synchronization rights, a legal term that describes "the use of music in audiovisual projects,"⁸ as well as dutifully perform at an industry showcase sponsored by influential online music magazine *Pitchfork*⁹ and tour to promote the *Grey's Anatomy* placement.¹⁰

The song's formal properties also synchronize with the program's generic affiliations and gendered address. "Matter of Waiting" relies upon the interplay between the pair's soaring mixed-gender vocal harmonies and Desi's impassioned guitar strumming in the context of a love song, which would sit comfortably within *Grey's* connotatively feminine associations with melodrama as a serial romance set in a hospital, told from a female protagonist's perspective, and watched by a visibly female (and oft-presumed heterosexual) audience. The pair also internalizes television's regulations for visual storytelling. Even though they are unaware of how

⁵ "Iowa," *Girls*, Season 4, Episode 1, January 15, 2015; "Close-Up," *Girls*, Season 4, Episode 6, February 22, 2015.

⁶ Matt Stahl, *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and The Politics Of Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 86-92; Michael Z. Newman, "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 16-34.

⁷ "Female Author," *Girls*, Season 4, Episode 3, January 25, 2015.

⁸ Steve Gordon, "A Simple Guide to Signing the Best Sync Deal Possible," *Digital Music News*. May 25, 2015. <http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2015/05/25/a-simple-guide-to-signing-the-best-sync-deal-possible/>

⁹ "Home Birth," *Girls*, Season 4, Episode 10, March 22, 2015.

¹⁰ "I Love You Baby," *Girls*, Season 5, Episode 10, April 17, 2016.

their music will be used in the episode—for example, they do not know what character’s death their song will accompany—they anticipate that it will have the appropriate pathos for a medical melodrama and later re-record “Matter of Waiting” so that it is short enough to score a montage. This reinforces Workshop Creative’s Director of Music Danny Exum’s claim that supervisors’ work ultimately “has to support picture,” a directive that musicians often internalize when they work in television in order to fulfill the creative and professional potential of contributing music for another medium and widening their network.¹¹ Finally, Marnie and Desi also trade in specialized knowledge that hints at music’s devalued status within the television industry. While they speak reverently about Patsavas and rattle off multiple screen credits because they are expected to know who she is as enterprising young musicians looking for various outlets of exposure, the music supervisor is still an obscure enough figure that Hannah cannot place her.

Marnie’s and Desi’s exchange about music supervision on *Girls* also doubles as a metatextual riff on the program’s reliance on indie rock musicians’ labor to construct its soundtrack. Throughout its run, *Girls*’ music supervisors Manish Raval and Tom Wolfe have consciously sought out emerging talent like Swedish electro duo Icona Pop, singer-songwriter Lia Ices, and indie rock group Børns for needle drops, an industry term referencing phonographic technology to describe how musicians’ recordings, as well as the subcultural capital their labor often represents to television and branding professionals’ eager to bend the ears of their young and/or musically literate consumer base, were integrated into television from the early 2000s on.¹² They have done so in order to reflect the characters’ youthfulness and studied hipness, to imbue the show’s tone with romantic ambiguity to reflect its female characters’ unfixed feminine identities, and to lessen budget costs by vetting emerging talent who are less expensive than

¹¹ Danny Exum, “Getting Syncs: The Real Truth From the Insiders,” SXSW 2016 Conference, March 18, 2016.

¹² Margo Whitmire, “Partners in Crime,” *Billboard* 117, no. 41 (2005):32-34.

veteran musicians who can ask for more money to compensate better-known work, in part because it has been licensed more extensively and in part because some of it existed in the pop lexicon long before music licensing became de rigueur in the television and film industries.¹³ But the on-screen representation of Marnie and Desi's labor does not stop at music supervision. Instead, it encompasses other practices like composition and performance. *Girls* commissioned composer Michael Penn, who began scoring films in the mid-1990s after enjoying minor success as a singer-songwriter, to write deliberately amateurish arrangements for Marnie's cover performances of Edie Brickell's "What I Am" and Kanye West's "Stronger" before she collaborated with Desi.¹⁴ Marnie and Desi's songs are also written by Dunham's partner Jack Antonoff.¹⁵ As the lead guitarist of the anthemic rock trio fun., the lead singer of synth-pop outfit Bleachers, and a seasoned songwriter-producer for Taylor Swift and Charli XCX, Antonoff has an ear for composing in different generic styles that imbues Marnie and Desi's mawkish songs—as well as the show for which they exist—with an air of character specificity. These various efforts produce textual representations of musical labor that appear to be seamless and coordinated within the context of a scene, episode, or season but result from media professionals' attempts to coordinate with the various timelines that organize *Girls*' production cycle.

This throwaway moment requires greater contextualization, a task that can be accomplished by marshaling industry studies' analytical directives in order to better understand the value of musicians' labor on television. Music is a rich site to explore these struggles for

¹³ Brian Moylan, "Girls' Music Supervisor Picks His Favorite Musical Moments From the Series," *Vulture*, April 17, 2016. <http://www.vulture.com/2016/04/girls-best-musical-moments.html>.

¹⁴ "Girls on Girls (+ One Guy) Podcast with Allison Williams," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 17, 2014. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/girls-podcast-allison-williams-marnies-688799>.

¹⁵ "Interview with Allison Williams," *HBO*, March 31, 2014. <http://www.hbo.com/girls/episodes/03/31-i-saw-you/interview.html>.

several reasons. First, music often elicits multiple, contingent affective responses.¹⁶ Music can also galvanize identity and subcultural formation, as well as offer meaning to the affective moments and interiorities of everyday life.¹⁷ Finally, music often accumulates significance through its associations with other media, which also makes it vulnerable to commercial appropriation.¹⁸ Thus, this dissertation argues that music's mediation is a site of struggle for professional recognition within industrial practice, particularly for people who bring popular music to television within the historical context of television's transition from multi-channel distribution to the post-network era and are thus beholden to the medium's complex, compressed, and often disorganized labor processes. This dissertation arrives at this conclusion by pursuing two questions over the course of four case studies. First, how does music function as a site for work between the television and music industries? Second, how does identity influence the value ascribed to music when it is signified by professionals whose work is being deployed as forms of sonic and commercial integration between producer, text, and audience?

This project addresses such concerns by offering an industrial history of musicians' labor on U.S. television from the early 1980s to the present that considers how identity, representation, and performance ascribe value to their work in television and explores the relationship between

¹⁶ Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis, (New York: Routledge, 1992): 9-29; John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992): 30-49; Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs, "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis, (New York: Routledge, 1992): 107-134.

¹⁷ Anthony Fung, "Faye and the Fandom of a Chinese Diva," *Popular Communication* 7 no. 4 (2009): 252-266; Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Sara Cohen, "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender," *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, edited by Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997): 17-36; Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979).

¹⁸ Michael Z. Newman, "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative." *Cinema Journal* 48 no. 3 (2009): 16-34.

media's production and circulation in relation to economic, temporal, technological, and identarian shifts within music, television, digital media, and its surrounding paratexts as it is felt by professionals working in the music industries. This dissertation claims that musicians have meaningfully contributed to television's historical trajectory since the early 1980s as collaborators on synergistic ventures for network and cable television in the United States while negotiating their participation as gendered, sexed, and/or raced subjects. It uses musicians' labor as a lens through which to understand how that shift was experienced across the music and television industries. Their labor has evolved in response to and alongside various technological, legal, and industrial shifts related to deregulation, narrowcasting, and convergence. Musicians also offer a diverse range of output for television. While there has been considerable interest in music supervisors over the past several years, this dissertation is not solely about supervision. It recognizes the profession as one field among many that mediate music for television that must be investigated alongside work like composition and booking in order to offer the full range of musicians' labor for the medium. Though all musicians are beholden to various licensing regulations that unevenly allow their contributions to travel across various formats and digital platforms, they take on a variety of professional responsibilities. Some compose theme songs and incidental music for programs and their ancillary products. Others perform before live studio audiences as band leaders and musical guests. Several allow and oversee the placement of recordings for TV syncs like dramatic sequences and montages, as well as permit songs from their back catalogue to be used for competition-based reality programming. Thus while Alex Patsavas is the subject of this dissertation's opening anecdote, this project is less interested in celebrating her minor celebrity and instead concerned with how musicians like Marnie and Desi seek to accommodate the medium of television within *Girls*' textual framework, as well as how

musicians like Penn and Antonoff contribute to its sonic register and generic representation behind the scenes as important figures to the show's production culture. Lastly, this is a project situated in a U.S. industrial context. Of course, the appeal and market impact of programs, networks, and channels transcend national borders. For example, *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been exported to the Philippines and several Latin American and European countries and reformatted in the United Kingdom.¹⁹ However, in an effort to narrow the focus of a project that encompasses multiple labor fields, historical timelines, and technological shifts, this dissertation will only consider such issues within their immediate national context, albeit with an awareness that the labor practices detailed herein are not unique to or bound by the United States.

Synchronization describes the seamless temporal coordination of events and actors working together in unison toward a shared goal. It takes its definition from its root word, “syn-,” a Greek prefix meaning “with.” This dissertation is preoccupied with the industrial terminology that follows from the prefix that so often helps define musicians' labor on television. It is perceived to exist as a byproduct of synergy, which Henry Jenkins defines as “[t]he economic opportunities that emerge in a context of horizontal integration where one media conglomerate holds interest in multiple channels of distribution.”²⁰ It requires synchronizing sound to image when editing score into an episode of narrative television, as Ron Rodman observes when he claims that “[t]he theme of a program provides a sort of temporal frame or buffer, separating the flow of television discourse with the flow of a particular narrative.”²¹ It frequently involves appraisals about the degree to which recording artists are “syncable,” or how

¹⁹ RuPaul and Michelle Visage, “Creating Your Own Luck, Bowie, & Lace Front Wigs,” *What's the Tee?*, May 21, 2014. <http://www.rupaulpodcast.com/episodes/2014/5/20/episode-4-creating-your-own-luck-david-bowie-lace-front-wigs>.

²⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 292-293.

²¹ Ron Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.

efficiently their music can be licensed to visual media for promotional purposes in order to generate revenue for multiple properties at once. Tim Anderson observes that such labor props up intermediaries like music supervisors while also devaluing emerging or independent talent who are expected to work for cheap due to their hunger for any kind of exposure.²² It is also suggestive of how televisual properties can use music to time shift between historical periods as a form of shorthand for a score's nostalgic revisionism or a pop song's place in drag history. Finally, some musicians' labor for television involves the construction of liveness, which can rely on lip syncing, a practice that Sarah Kessler and Karen Tongson claim requires a performer "to anticipate what's going to be said next while remembering what's just been said: and existing "in both the future and the past" in order to make such mimesis legible as musical labor.²³ These acts, they argue "circumvent linearity and synchronization."²⁴

Kessler and Tongson thus question whether music is synchronously integrated into television at all. Such a position challenges former *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* booking agent Jonathan Cohen once told *Billboard* contributor Reggie Ugwu that "[m]usic is essential to our show—it's not just four minutes tacked on at the end."²⁵ Despite Cohen's ovations, music on television is often tacked on. It is whittled down to a verse, chorus, or evocative lyrical phrase. It defers to television's narrative, generic, and commercial directives. Musicians' work is often integrated asynchronously with television's work flow, by turns a foundational aspect of pre-production, a last-minute replacement, a prohibitively expensive and excised flourish vulnerable to replacement, a sonic element that is sweetened or buried in the mix, a cue unearthed from a

²² Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*, 118-153.

²³ Sarah Kessler and Karen Tongson, "Karaoke and Ventriloquism: Echoes and Divergences," *Sounding Out!*, May 12, 2014. <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2014/05/12/karaoke-and-ventriloquism-echoes-and-divergences/>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Reggie Ugwu, "Springboard," *Billboard* 125, no. 9 (2013): 27.

record label's catalogue or a music library, or a post-production addition. Such a position challenges how television industry professionals often represent musicians' work as integral to specific productions, particularly in the context of industrial convergence.

Acknowledging these messy labor conditions, which are differently felt across media texts and paratexts, help address film scholar James Tobias's directive that media and sound studies scholars challenge "why and how musicality and gesture have been so frequently, consistently, and broadly deployed for emphasizing the synchronization not simply of sound and image streams but of historical and contemporized time, in streaming media undergoing radical transformations in their technological materialities, in their medium specificities, in the formal variations, and their reuse."²⁶ This project heeds Derek Johnson's observation that "the institutionalization of franchise strategies and practices starting in the 1980s," an era that developed new and refined older methods for folding music into such corporate actions, "problematized common claims about media consolidation. Instead, as multiple industries came into interoperation, franchised production networks served as sites of struggle and negotiation for and between media institutions (often thwarting synergy in the process)."²⁷ Only some of the programs discussed in this dissertation would constitute media franchises like the ones Johnson analyzes, particularly *The Simpsons* in terms of its extensive transmedia and merchandising efforts and *Late Night* through its hosts' desire for differentiation in a manner similar to the programming and promotional distinctions made between television and film spin-offs. However, the television and music industries' interoperation during the multi-channel transition and the post-network era also create sites of struggle and negotiation between institutions that

²⁶ James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 10.

²⁷ Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 22.

undermine the presumed fluidity of synergistic media practices. At stake in recognizing the challenges at work in attempting to synchronize both industries is a richer understanding of the labor responsible for bringing music to television and the claims to identity formation that come with synthesizing new cultural and industrial relationships, particularly as they co-exist within ever-changing temporalities of work within both the television and music industries.

Industrial Convergence

Henry Jenkins defines convergence as “a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them” as part of an unfixed, “ongoing process or series of intersections” between producers and fans.²⁸ These intersections are aided by the consolidation that organizes media labor and distributes financial resources. Jennifer Holt effectively demonstrates as much in her historical analysis of the various political and corporate maneuvers that facilitated the media industries’ structural convergence in the years prior the Telecommunications Act of 1996.²⁹ Though this piece of legislation is often cited as the watershed moment for media deregulation and conglomeration, Holt invaluablely contextualizes its influence by investigating the fifteen years of policy reform that preceded its passage. In particular, she highlights the major film studios’ unsuccessful legal battle against HBO’s early monopoly on cable’s film exhibition, Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner’s acquisition of 20th Century Fox’s and MGM/United Artists’ film assets to create Fox and pioneer superstation WTBS, and the vertical re-integration of major studios like Warner Bros.³⁰ However, Holt’s political economic approach and focus on the television and film industries prevents her from

²⁸ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 282.

²⁹ Jennifer Holt, *Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-43, 69-92, 93-114.

considering how these machinations influenced their convergence with the music industries within these ownership structures and the texts they helped produce. At roughly the same time, the television industry began experiencing rapid shifts due to the development of media technologies like the VCR and remote control that allowed viewers' greater agency in their reception practices through time shifting that evaded the intractability of appointment viewing, as well as more choices due to an increase in broadcast networks and cable channels with original programming. Amanda Lotz labels this period as the "multi-channel transition" between the network and the post-network era, a historical shift that began to occur during the mid-2000s.³¹ However, she also notes that "[d]ifferent forms of television experienced this shift at varied pace, and the sundry components of production—processes such as making, distributing, and financing television, among others—also developed new practices on varied schedules."³²

Some scholars have acknowledged popular musicians' integration into convergence media properties. For example, Eileen Meehan's formative study on the origins of the *Batman* franchise positions Prince's participation in the soundtrack as a Warner Bros. artist in relation to Warner Communication's acquisition of DC Comics as a subsidiary of Time Warner.³³ Meehan persuasively claims that the synergistic film adaptation was the result of transindustrial integration. But her macro-level industry analysis disallows her from engaging with Prince's involvement on the project beyond presenting it as evidence of cross-industrial coordination. Such an interpretation prevents her from reading *Batman* alongside the production history of Prince's own cinematic origin story, *Purple Rain*, which Warner Bros.'s film studio released to

³¹ Amanda D. Lotz, *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ Eileen R. Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," in *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, eds. Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio (New York: Routledge, 1991): 47-65.

great commercial success after the label gradually accumulated good will during the first five years of his prolific career.³⁴ Meehan also ignores Prince's strained relationship with Warner Bros. during *Batman*'s production, which extended to disagreements between the label and artist over the soundtrack itself and eventually resulted in his contentious departure from the company in the mid-1990s.³⁵ This dissertation offers a corrective by focusing on musicians' constant interfacing between the two industries that so often define and determine their worth.

Industry hierarchies shape how we understand the placement of pre-existing music in television and the labor responsible for its presence. In order to make sense of such hierarchization and intervene against it, Norma Coates posits the term "television music" as a corrective to scholars' pervasive use of "music television." Coates argues that "music television" is insufficient because it is premised upon two separate realms, with the second term engulfed by the first as a result of the cultural weight placed on music, as well as the interchangeable use of "music television" and "music videos" in media scholarship.³⁶ For Coates "television music" foregrounds "how the affective as well as the visual properties of popular music augment or in some cases dictate its television incarnation and/or television aesthetics, conventions, and practices," as well as complicates "conjunctions between television and musical genres."³⁷ Following from Coates' intervention, this dissertation posits that a history of musicians' labor on television is a history of television, and expands on that history by analyzing musicians' work in a variety of genres and their corresponding industrial contexts.

³⁴ Brian Raftery, "Dearly Beloved," in *Spin: Greatest Hits: 25 Years of Heretics, Heroes, and the New Rock 'n' Roll*, ed. Doug Brod (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009): 248-268.

³⁵ Eriq Gardner and Ashley Cullins, "Prince's Legal Legacy," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 21, 2016. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/princes-legal-legacy-contract-fights-886521>.

³⁶ Norma J. Coates, "Filling in Holes: Television Music as a Recuperation of Popular Music on Television," *Music Sound and the Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (2007): 22-23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

There is a considerable amount of academic research on music video, which came to prominence during the 1980s and influenced both the aesthetics of advertising and narrative television as well as networks' and channels' programming strategies throughout the decade and long after it. Much of it focuses on music video's formal properties, ideological frameworks, intertextual references to film and art, and paratextual significance as a way to circulate pop iconography, or the form's commercial potential and global reach through its tethering to MTV's channel brand and Viacom's corporate interests from the mid-1980s on.³⁸ This is invaluable work that helps map out the historical topographies that this project investigates. Yet such scholarship risks suggesting that music video's ascent was a seismic shift rather than a gradual accumulation of shared labor practices between film, television, music, and radio. It also threatens to mischaracterize MTV as the only industrial space for music's convergence with television when it was one site of cross-industrial interoperation, as this history demonstrates.

In this regard, scholarship on music licensing and intermediaries like music supervisors and other media industry professionals who serve as gatekeepers between multiple sectors have been enormously helpful. Bethany Klein observes that supervision's ascent also coincided with the development of new avenues for promoting recording artists after the consolidation of radio in the wake of the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.³⁹ This deregulatory measure

³⁸ Pat Aufderheide, "Music Videos: The Look of the Sound," *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 1 (1986): 57-78; E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Post-Modernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Blaine Allan, "Musical Cinema, Music Video, Music Television," *Film Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1990): 2-14; Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Simon Frith et al., *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Jack Banks, *Monopoly Television: MTV's Quest to Control the Music* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Steve Jones, "MTV: The Medium was the Message," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 1 (2005): 83-88.

³⁹ Bethany Klein, "'The New Radio': Music Licensing as a Response to Industry Woe," *Media, Culture & Society* 30, no. 4 (2008): 463-478.

severely compromised college and public radio stations' commitment to showcase the distinct character of their local music scenes, alternative and modern rock formats' effort to represent heterogeneous regional markets, and all parties' ability to "discover" a wide variety of new and emerging musical acts to their listeners. This era also marked the decline of video promotion as music-based cable channels like MTV prioritized lifestyle programming. Thus to Klein, supervisors ostensibly served as "the new radio" or "the new A&R"—key figures who navigated the transition from broadcast-based forms of musical distribution to artists' integration into other commercial media properties by applying the success of compilation film soundtracks and the advent of MTV to narrative television.⁴⁰ Networks like the WB used tags—bumpers at the ends of episodes—to serve as promotion and leverage for licensing reductions by offering "free" publicity to recording artists in the form of on-screen credits in exchange for lowered synchronization fees.⁴¹ New and independent artists (or, more often, the publishers and labels who often owned their work) were perceived as accommodating music licensing, as it promised exposure and collaboration in the industrial context of convergence.⁴² In addition, they were also less well-known and perceived as more amenable to cheaper licensing deals or recording contracts that exploited their "syncable" sound.⁴³ Ben Aslinger identifies that the ubiquity of music licensing in the 2000s signified "changes in the relationship of formerly disparate sectors

⁴⁰ David Shumway, "Rock 'n' Roll Sound Tracks and the Production of Nostalgia," *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 2 (1999): 36-51; Kay Dickinson, "Pop, Speed, Teenagers and the 'MTV Aesthetic,'" in *Movie Music, the Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson (New York: Routledge, 2003): 143-151; Lawrence Grossberg, "Cinema, Postmodernity and Authenticity," in *Movie Music, the Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson (New York: Routledge, 2003): 83-97.

⁴¹ Benjamin S. Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time: Gender, the WB, and Teen Culture" in *Teen Television: Essays On Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2008): 78-91.

⁴² Barnett, "Chop Shop, Music Supervision and the Recording Industry's Possible Futures"; Natalie Lewandowski, "Understanding Creative Roles in Entertainment: The Music Supervisor as Case Study," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 865-875; Aslinger, "Aural Appearances: Popular Music, Televisuality, and Technology"; Klein, "The New Radio."

⁴³ Aslinger, "Aural Appearances: Popular Music, Televisuality, and Technology"; Barnett, "Chop Shop, Music Supervision and the Recording Industry's Possible Futures."

of the entertainment industry necessitate new ways of understanding music's contribution to television narrative."⁴⁴ This in turn allowed scholars to better understand "the emergence of new popular music economies, distribution pathways, representational possibilities, and industrial battlegrounds,"⁴⁵ which this project seeks to tease out by focusing explicitly on musicians' labor in relation to these new economies, pathways, possibilities, and contexts and by looking at how popular music shaped television from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era.

Musical Labor

The commercial integrity of music grew progressively more unstable following a massive wave of consolidation that began rippling through the music industries at the turn of the 1970s and made it increasingly commonplace for a recording artist to be signed to a label that was the music division of a multinational conglomerate that also owned film studios, television networks, and publishing companies.⁴⁶ The next decade began with a debilitating recession, as labels relied upon the commercial success of high-profile (and prohibitively expensive) artists rather than developing rosters of new talent with more robust catalogues.⁴⁷ Vinyl's output would diminish over the course of the decade due to the widespread closure of pressing plants and reliance upon recycled vinyl following the 1973 oil crisis and industrial engineering of the compact disc as the standard music format starting in the mid-1980s, despite the music business's reliance upon cassette sales well into the 1990s.⁴⁸ The music industries were also transformed by the increasing

⁴⁴ Aslinger, "Aural Appearances," 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁷ Stephen Grover, "Record Business Slumps as Taping and Video Games Take Away Sales," *Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 1982, 31; William K. Knoedelseder Jr., "Record Firms Coming Out of Spin," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1983, E1; Reebee Garofalo, "From Music Publishing to MP3: Music and Industry in the Twentieth Century," *American Music* 17, no. 3 (1999): 318-354.

⁴⁸ Andrew Bottomley, "'Home Taping is Killing Music': The Recording Industries' 1980s Anti-Home Taping Campaigns and Struggles Over Production, Labor, and Creativity," *Creative Industries Journal* 8 no. 2 (2015): 123-145; Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Michael DeGusta, "The REAL Death of the Music Industry," *Business Insider*, February 18, 2011. <http://www>.

mobility of electronic instruments and consumer technologies, including the synthesizer as well as the Walkman and the CD, as Tia DeNora, Michael Bull, and Will Straw have observed.⁴⁹ Finally, the launch of MTV in 1981 forever altered the music industries' relationship to television. However, despite the cable channel's threat to revolutionize the medium at the expense of network television's industrial dominance, record labels often provided MTV with music videos for free and the production of these promotional clips were often billed back to the musical act as a recoupable cost. Furthermore, when Viacom bought two-thirds of the channel from Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment Company in 1984, the company demanded that MTV diversify its programming after it plunged into a multi-billion dollar debt.⁵⁰ These combined forces made it increasingly difficult for musicians to make a living purely off of album sales and touring returns, and thus began pursuing supplemental income in other media industries in order to earn a living. In other words, musicians' labor was inherently convergent by necessity.

However, David Hesmondhalgh surmises that indie rock always relied upon entrepreneurial hustle in his analysis of British independent labels, observing bands' partnerships with American-based major labels to secure international distribution.⁵¹ Holly Kruse notes that many independent record labels began to acquire mainstream distribution or were absorbed by major labels, largely out of an inability to compete.⁵² She then discusses independent distributors

businessinsider.com/these-charts-explain-the-real-death-of-the-music-industry-2011-2; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); David L. Morton Jr., *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004); Mark Coleman, *Playback: From the Victrola to MP3, 100 Years of Music, Machines, and Money* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2003).

⁴⁹ Will Straw, "The Music CD and Its Ends," *Design and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2009): 79-92; Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Michael Bull, *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (New York: Berg, 2000).

⁵⁰ R. Serge Denisoff, *Inside MTV* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988); Jack Banks. *Monopoly Television: MTV's Quest to Control the Music* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

⁵¹ David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre," *Cultural Studies* 13 no. 1 (1999): 34-61.

⁵² Kruse, *Site and Sound*.

and observes that they often act like major label distributors by making conservative, risk-averse business decisions. Simultaneously, independent distributors often lack the national attention, reimbursement structure, and ability to bridge the gap between covering shipping and paying the label. Importantly, both scholars avoid vilifying the music industry as disempowering to musicians' artistic autonomy. Keith Negus offers more nuance to the contributions of record labels and their employees by bridging political economy and cultural studies as approaches to understanding musical labor. By using the production of rap, country, and salsa as his case studies, Negus argues that "to understand the issue of culture and the music industry it is necessary to think away from organizational culture in a narrow sense and towards the broader cultural patterns that intersect with an organization, to think away from *culture within an industry* and towards an *industry within culture*."⁵³

Over time, technologies and business practices allowed for the industrial and cultural advent of convergence, which had a considerable impact on music's economic solvency and distribution practices. Recording artists increasingly position themselves as entrepreneurs in the music industries' digital economy, as Jeremy Morris, Eric Harvey, and Tim Anderson observe.⁵⁴ As a result, despite the music industries' historical relationship with television, live performance has to be contemporized with deeper consideration to industrial shifts in recording and television industry labor. In his overview of musicians' engagement with digital distribution and social media, Harvey argues that "the older ways of doing things have not simply disappeared, and it thus becomes important to address new media technologies by assessing the ways in which they

⁵³ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Wade Morris, "Artists as Entrepreneurs, Fans as Workers," *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 273-290; Eric Harvey, "Same as the Old Boss? Changes, Continuities, and Careers in the Digital Music Era," in *Managing Media Work*, ed. Mark Deuze (London: Sage, 2011): 237-248; Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*.

rupture with, and build upon, their predecessors.”⁵⁵ Artists who break into the industry via social media also rely on label and network support. Harvey also calls into question the “indie”-ness of such proceedings, noting the increasing necessity of independent labels to have major label affiliations, as well as partner with licensing firms to guarantee the commerciality of their products. This has a myriad of implications for intermediary labor in finding and cultivating musical artists who are “syncable” in convergent, synergistic media ventures between music, television, and new media. Applying Michael Scott’s concept of cultural entrepreneurship, Jeremy Morris uses recording artist Imogen Heap as a case study to demonstrate the importance of integrating social media—in this case, through fan participation—into the music-making process. Social media promises more outlets for musicians to make claims to artistic control over their work, particularly those who feel controlled or poorly supported by the major labels, yet it also requires musicians to integrate digital labor into the production process at a precarious time in the music industry. This has a myriad of implications for musicians who need to synchronize with various convergent media ventures for television. Much of Morris and Harvey’s attention toward cultural entrepreneurship and digital distribution in music serve to comment on the industry’s precarious economic conditions and their effects on work. In addition, Anderson observes that the advent of the Web, the influx of various communication technologies and mobile devices, and the expansion of cable and satellite television created “more licensing opportunities just as the sales of recordings quickly dwindled. As media channels grew so did the need for programming that demanded music.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Harvey, “Same as the Old Boss,” 238.

⁵⁶ Tim Anderson, “From Background Music to Above-the-Line Actor: The Rise of the Music Supervisor in Converging Televisual Environments,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 3 (2013): 133.

Key to understanding media labor in a contemporary moment is the concept of precarity, which Mark Deuze defines as “[t]he state of worker subjectivity defined by constant (re-) schooling and training, unlearning ‘old’ skills while adapting to changing technologies and management demands, moving from projects, and navigating one’s career through an at-times bewildering sea of loose affiliations, temporary arrangements, and informal networks.”⁵⁷ Precarity frames media workers’ lives within the context of risk and uncertainty. In *Media Work*, Deuze situates the changing nature of media work in a climate of media deregulation and economic and industrial precarity. This intervention reflects John Caldwell’s claim in *Production Culture* that precarity increasingly shapes both above- and below-the-line labor in the context of conglomeration, deregulation, and post-Fordism as well as Vicki Mayer’s analysis of how below-the-line professionals struggle over creative autonomy and professional legitimacy.⁵⁸

However, the extent to which the “line” is useful for describing musicians’ labor in the television industry remains an open question. Of course, Mayer and Caldwell are both critical of the hierarchies built into the “line” and problematize the binaristic ways in which “skill” is a descriptor bestowed upon below-the-line professionals like visual effects supervisors and reality show casters, while “creativity” is designated to above-the-line professionals like screenwriters, directors, and showrunners. Also, the “line” has material and organizational consequences that structure musicians’ labor on television and thus cannot simply be dismissed. While there have been some notable contributions to the study of professionals like music supervisors,⁵⁹ such

⁵⁷ Mark Deuze, *Media Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁵⁹ Tim J. Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Kyle Barnett, “Chop Shop, Music Supervision and the Recording Industry’s Possible Futures,” *Flow*, September 24, 2010. <http://flowtv.org/2010/09/chop-shop-music-supervision-and-the-recording-industry/>.

scholarship tends to treat celebrated figures within the field as above-the-line professionals in ways that are not universally applied to supervision. Such designations do not always neatly apply to recording artists. Likewise, there has been valuable research done on music's integration into early broadcast television.⁶⁰ There is also scholarship that considers musicians' celebrity and identity from a labor perspective, upon which this project is beholden.⁶¹ Admittedly, some of this work is enacted within the organizational frameworks of above- and below-the-line labor due to musicians' integration into television industry practices. Often musicians are assigned to work in technical departments that operate below-the-line as composers, performers, and recording artists who work closely with the sound department, technical crew, editors, bookers, and music supervisors in order to serve the needs of above-the-line talent, like network and channel executives, creators, showrunners, screenwriters, hosts, and producers.

Yet musicians' labor does not always neatly fit as a member of a show's sound or music department and they are often hired on in a limited capacity as a contract player or guest working on commission. In this regard, their labor is most clearly described as "for-hire," a distinction Matt Stahl defines as work "whose authorship (and therefore the control of the work, for the life of the copyright) resides not in the actual creator but in that creator's employer or contractor" on the basis as whether the material eligible for copyright is produced by an employee and whether such works were made by freelancers or independent contractors, a distinction that includes "a

⁶⁰ Murray Forman, *One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Norma J. Coates, "It's a Man's, Man's World: Television and the Masculinization of Rock Discourse and Culture" (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002).

⁶¹ Kristin J. Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry: The Social Construction of Female Popular Music Stars* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Matt Stahl, *Unfree Masters*; Matt Stahl and Leslie M. Meier, "The Firm Foundation of Organizational Flexibility: The 360 Contract in the Digitalizing Music Industry." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37 (2012): 441-458; Leslie M. Meier, "Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: Recording Artists, Brands, and 'Rendering Authenticity.'" *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 4 (2011): 399-415; Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*; David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie."

part of a motion picture or audiovisual work.”⁶² While almost all media labor is arguably “for-hire,” Stahl takes care to note that such labor distinctions are endemic to the politics of attribution and accreditation that structure the music industries specifically. Stahl notes that within the music industries, “the concept of work for hire is ingrained because of the unequal bargaining power of performers and companies,” particularly over the publishing and recording rights that are often bestowed to record labels and the various intermediaries tasked with “representing” the musicians on their rosters.⁶³ Though musicians’ labor is organized and protected by a variety of professional organizations like the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers and the American Federation of Musicians, only composers receive guild representation in the television and film industries. As a result, “[w]ork for hire splits author from creator: if an employee creates a work; then in the absence of a contract to the contrary, work for hire alienates the work from the employee-creator. The employee is the employer’s instrument or medium of creation, the work is the employer’s; the employer is the author and owner.”⁶⁴ It is within this organizational logic that musicians work on television.

To that end, this dissertation follows from John Williamson’s and Martin Cloonan’s assertion that “there is no such thing as a single music industry. There are, however, people working in a range of industries centered around music.”⁶⁵ They advocate for the use of “music industries” to describe the range of activities, responsibilities, sectors, and competing interests around music’s production, distribution, and reception. They argue that “music industry” suggests homogeneity “whereas the reality is of disparate industries with some common

⁶² Stahl, *Unfree Masters*, 190.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁵ John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, “Rethinking the Music Industry,” *Popular Music* 26, no. 2 (2007): 320.

interests” that often operate in conflict or in competition with each other.⁶⁶ In addition, “recording industry” tends to be used with little attention toward how the term privileges the vested interests of conglomerate-owned major labels and ignores recorded music’s decreased economic value since the late 1990s relative to live performance, publishing, merchandising, promotional paratexts, synchronization with visual media texts, and digital distribution.⁶⁷

Williamson and Cloonan also note that scholar David Hesmondhalgh’s advocates for adopting “the music industries” in scholarly parlance in address publishing, live performance, and recordings, while also criticizing him and Negus for inconsistently applying the term in their own work.⁶⁸ Such a critical framework helps organize and illustrate the various ways in which music is defined, absorbed, and reconfigured within television from the advent of cable television to our current era of rapidly multiplying streaming platforms and viewing devices. It also indicates how musicians’ labor is simultaneously a reflection of such technological and industrial expansion, a harmonic chord struck between sectors, and a cacophonous rattle emitted from convergence’s labyrinthine and oftentimes incompatible work flows and production practices. Finally, Hesmondhalgh’s proposed areas around which to divide the music industries reflects the case studies that shape this dissertation, which simultaneously consider how some musicians create television scores whose publishing rights are owned by television studios, networks and channels, or production companies; offer live performances that are mediated for television; and allow for their recorded material to be licensed for individual programs. Thus unless a passage directly addresses the recording industry sector, this dissertation will use “music industries” to refer to the various competing, tethered, or distinct work practices that organize

⁶⁶ Ibid., 305.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 314.

⁶⁸ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 17.

musicians' labor for television from the early 1980s to the present and advocate that scholars recognize the music industries as television industries too. But to make sense of how those industrial relations are organized and valued, attention must finally be paid toward identity's role in shaping textual and industrial representation.

Identity Work

Stuart Hall argues that identity formations involve a productive tension between the constructedness of personhood and the "essential" differences between people.⁶⁹ These theories are developed by understandings of how unique yet often overlapping markers of identity like gender, sexuality, and race help make subjects differently recognizable in both textual and industrial representations. Such issues are amplified when we consider how musicians shape television programs as expressions of their professional identities, which are so often bound up in questions of gender, race, or sexuality, are activated and made legible through a visual medium and the industries that frame it. Judith Butler conceptualizes identity as a performance, a nexus of activities and norms that also define a musician's original composition, stage presentation, or recording as it is folded into a television program. She argues that "gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes."⁷⁰ Rather, it is "performative," in that it constitutes "the identity it is purported to be," and "always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed."⁷¹ Therefore, "[t]here is no gender identity behind expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁷² Language is tremendously important in this regard,

⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and its Futures: Understanding Modern Societies*, eds. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew (Cambridge, Polity Press: 1992), 285-287.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, Routledge: 1990/2007), 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

because “[t]he subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility.”⁷³ However, scholars like Alexander Weheliye argue that music making relies on language differently by calling attention to the importance of sonic textures and confluences in relation to a desire for intelligibility and advocating for distinguishing between “*the* subject as a determinate linguistic category and *a* subject as an indeterminate sonic opacity, as long as we remember that the two are contiguous.”⁷⁴ Weheliye’s invocation of confluence—or the joining of two rivers—also makes sense given his belief that black cultural production and sound technologies are mutually constitutive. It is also evocative of Hall’s notion of articulation, as “the form of the connection that *can* make unity of two different elements, under certain conditions” but “is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time.”⁷⁵ This then corresponds with Sara Ahmed’s discussion of intersectionality as a way “to complicate the relationship between motility and institutional lines” by considering how and why some bodies are “out of line” with the institutions they inhabit while others “cross with other lines to create and divide spaces,” in order to claim that “[h]ow one moves along institutional lines is affected by the other lines that one follows.”⁷⁶ Thus, this dissertation considers the ways in which intersectional identity formations are bound up in musicking, or as Christopher Small defines it, the capacities to participate “in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”⁷⁷

Thus following from Butler, “musicking” is also “always a doing.” On television,

⁷³ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11.

⁷⁴ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 69.

⁷⁵ Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation,” in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 142.

⁷⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, DC: Duke University Press, 2006), 136.

⁷⁷ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

musicians' labor is so often tied to how their sense of self is performed and legible through their presentation of knowledge and skill around the production and consumption of music. The term extends the traditional associations between performance and other music-making practices like composition, rehearsal, presentation, and listening in relation to mediation and its actors, as well as the ways in which their ability "to music" is bound up in their identities. This dissertation argues that by mapping the arc of television history from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era, scholars can see the medium learn how "to music" intersectionally. That is why this industrial history begins with white men's identification with hegemonically white male musical forms like rock as television creators and composers, then considers how white male talk show hosts perform their rock fandom as a retreat from or in conflict with cultural difference through minority forms of musical production, before looking at how niche audiences were cultivated on cable through musicians' appeals to women and gay men.

Genre is a crucial organizing principle for understanding the integration of musicians' labor into television as identity work. As this dissertation demonstrates throughout, music and television are often used together to make clear distinctions about what kind of content is for whom, as well as what kind of media workers can work in and with particular genres. In his book-length study of rap, country, and salsa artists' complex navigation of the various corporate channels that comprise the recording side of the music industries, Negus defines musical genre as "the way in which musical categories and systems of classification shape the music we might be play and listen to, mediating both the experience of music and its formal organization by the music industry."⁷⁸ Building upon Simon Frith's notion of a "genre world" as "a complex

⁷⁸ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 4.

interplay of musicians, listeners, and mediating ideologies,”⁷⁹ Negus argues that musical genres exist within “an unstable intersection of music industry and media, fans and audience cultures, musician networks and broader social collectivities informed by distinct features of solidarity and social identity.”⁸⁰ To that end, he posits that musical genres are formed industrially through “the institutional routines of commerce and trade” and as “the concerted actions of human endeavor.”⁸¹ Such an approach to genre applies not only to popular music, but also to the music industries’ relationship to television. Jason Mittell argues for television genres to be considered as cultural categories that “transect the boundaries between text and context with production, distribution, promotion, exhibition, criticism, and reception practices all working to categorize media texts into genres.”⁸² His work follows from Julie D’Acci’s definitive scholarship on *Cagney and Lacey*, a televisual expression of liberal feminism during the 1980s that illustrates how “television genres work to produce gender in a number of ways,” through the assumptions about masculinity and femininity built into the construction of protagonists, audience positioning, narrative structure, textual representations, and spectatorial address.⁸³

This project builds upon Negus’s notion of “genre cultures,” a term he uses to describe “the interplay and uneasy interaction between economics (music as commodity, various business strategies and organizational structures) and culture (the practices, interpretations, and ways of life of musicians, fans, and industry workers) and the ways in which the two often blur and fuse” in genre categories’ “organization of music companies, the creative practices of musicians and

⁷⁹ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 88.

⁸⁰ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 174.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 175

⁸² Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in America* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9-10.

⁸³ Julie D’Acci, *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 108.

the perception of audiences.”⁸⁴ It seeks to understand how musical genre cultures are integrated into post-network television through various networks’ and channels’ production practices and promotional and branding strategies. It also applies Mittell’s directive to “examine genres as discursive practices,” in this case as they tether two sectors in the service of using original music, live performance, and licensed recordings to create value for variety, reality, dramatic, and comedic programming within the historical context of post-network television.⁸⁵ Much of the work of generic codification and commingling is accomplished through the belief that there is a shared affinity between television and musical creative talent and the audiences those programs seek to represent through collaborative practices.

To that end, fandom is a shared currency across all of these case studies. Music’s presence on these shows and their respective exhibitors follows from performances of fandom embedded in the programs’ textual and industrial representation that is perceived as common ground with their target viewership. Performances of fandom on television frequently lubricate the medium’s convergence with the music industries. However, music fandom is differently configured in each chapter because of the various ways in which musical genre is drawn upon and mobilized for television. Bringing music to television is the work of identity formation. Music mobilizes multiple worker identities, the identity politics governing the work worlds in which they dwell, and the identities of audiences hailed by the texts in which they work. These theories are developed by understandings of how unique yet often overlapping markers of identity like gender, sexuality, and race help make subjects differently recognizable in both textual and industrial representations. Such issues are amplified when we consider how music is

⁸⁴ Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*, 3.

⁸⁵ Mittell, *Genre and Television*, 12.

integrated into television, how labor is enacted by musicians who produce it for television, and how their identities ascribe industrial and cultural value to those convergent properties.

Yet this project heeds Barry Shank's warning that "linking the relationship between the political and the musical through identity often solidifies that identity," which in turn mobilizes genre as a tool for turning identity into "a reified object rather than a subjective set of processes."⁸⁶ It is for these reasons that genre must also be understood in relation to authorship when considering musicians' labor on television not only as a textual representation, but as an industrial form always in the process of becoming. In addition to generic categorization, musicians' contributions to television are also bound up in questions of authorship. For one, musicians' labor largely functions as shorthand for edge, a branding strategy that Michael Curtin identifies as a way for the television industry to appeal to audiences' tendencies to "cluster around a product because it meets their distinctive needs or tastes" in relation to the advent of flexible accumulation that restructured the culture industries during the 1970s and 80s.⁸⁷ Yet musicians' labor in these contexts is often vulnerable to incorporation, a term Dick Hebdige uses to define punk rock's ingratiation into mass culture, which transpired in part through commodification. While such subcultural forms "may begin by issuing symbolic challenges" through style and sound, "they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries, or rejuvenating old ones."⁸⁸

Thus, in order to understand musicians' efforts within television, this dissertation recognizes authorship as a negotiated subject position. To do so, it draws from what John

⁸⁶ Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 14.

⁸⁷ Michael Curtin, "On Edge: Culture Industries in the Neo-Network Era," in *Making and Selling Culture*, eds. Richard Ohmann, Michael Curtin, Gage Averill, David Shumway, and Elizabeth G. Traube (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 186-188.

⁸⁸ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 96.

Caldwell refers to as the logic of authorship, a negotiated articulation of industrial and professional branding alongside the implicit sense of what fan audiences will tolerate as the limits of textual authenticity.⁸⁹ Following Caldwell's example, this project challenges the idea that scholars, viewers, and listeners can uniquely identify all contributions from these professionals as "authorial signatures" or "brands" they imbue or embed in the programs on which they work. This suggests that such work is the product of across-the-line collaboration rather one person's singular vision. These theories of authorship correspond with Matt Hills' notion of counter-authorship, or the struggles and competing claims to authorship that surface when multiple workers engage in paratextual production.⁹⁰ In this regard, Mary Kearney's discussion of authorship in relation to girls' independent media production is also potentially useful. Drawing upon Constance Penley's work on women's fandom and Richard Dyer's theorization of authorship and marginalized identity as performance, Kearney argues that such contributions are useful "for analyzing texts produced by deprivileged individuals since it posits authors' identities as implicated in their cultural productions, yet maintains that these identities are never stable nor all-determining."⁹¹ Such theories of authorship are useful to apply to musicians, whose creative labor is often devalued as peripheral or vulnerable to manipulation or treated as an expression of above-the-line professionals' tastes or business savvy. In addition to their critiques of auteurism, scholars like James Naremore, Richard Dyer, and Geeta Ramanathan are also wary of the post-structuralist move to declare the author's death precisely at the cultural and industrial moment when *some* women, queer people, and/or people of color can finally claim

⁸⁹ John Caldwell, "Authorship Below-the-Line," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, eds. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 349-369.

⁹⁰ Matt Hills, "From Chris Chibnall to Fox: *Torchwood's* Marginalized Authors and Counter-Discourses of TV Authorship," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, eds. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 200-220.

⁹¹ Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 150.

authorial status as media producers.⁹² Following Wendy Hollway, Kearney argues that such discourses of identity allow us to consider “the different levels of access individuals have to different discourses as a result of their position within social hierarchies” determined by intersecting demographic characteristics.⁹³

Kearney also claims that, in addition to how discursive access relates to our bodies’ positions within particular sociohistoric contexts, “the process of discursive investment is complicated by psychological and intellectual development, particularly the accumulation of education and experience” that allow for individuals’ uneven accumulation of cultural capital “and thus a specific degree of access to the spectrum of discursive positions.”⁹⁴ Such theorizations allow us to account for how musicians’ authorship develops in both traditional professional settings like offices and studios, as well as environments like musical venues, backstage areas, and domestic spaces, which might be devalued as leisure sites that are often gendered and pathologized as either conventionally masculine—and therefore dangerous or inappropriate for women—or traditionally feminine, and often delegitimized. It also relates to how musicians interact with above-the-line professionals like on-air talent, screenwriters, and executive producers, a relevant concern for the last two case studies in this dissertation, which consider musicians’ work on shows overseen by white women and gay men of color.

Identity politics inflect authorship and thus require us to think critically about visibility. While industry discourse tends to bestow authorship upon above-the-line professionals like executive producers, directors, screenwriters, and actors, production studies scholars like John

⁹² Geeta Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women’s Films* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006); Richard Dyer, “Believing in Fairies: The Author and the Homosexual,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 185-201; James Naremore, “Authorship,” in *A Companion to Film Theory*, eds. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (London: Blackwell, 1981), 9-24.

⁹³ Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, 150-151.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

Caldwell, Miranda Banks, Vicki Mayer, and Erin Hill argue against the auteurist impulses behind such hierarchies. These scholars emphasize the collaborative nature of media production. They champion below-the-line workers' creative acumen, signposting the originality and innovation behind work like visual effects, costume design, camera operators, and casting.⁹⁵ All four scholars pay particular attention to the gendering of certain below-the-line professions. Banks and Hill argue that costume design and casting are delegitimated and made invisible because of essentialized notions of femininity due to the nature of the work and the labor behind it, which is primarily represented by female and gay male media professionals. Caldwell and Mayer note complementary appeals to legitimation within the fields of visual effects and soft-core camera work through emphases on technical prowess that is further masculinized by the predominance of men in these professions.⁹⁶ Matt Stahl also considers the importance of visibility to copyright, which regulates who receives authorial credit and work-for-hire status within the contemporary music industry.⁹⁷ Thus identity comes to bear in how musicians' labor is recognized as such, and how value is differently extracted from it for television.

Methodologies

Musical labor a productive site through which to explore, through their efforts to mediate music, how struggles over identity resonate in the texts they help produce and in the professional contexts in which they work. In order to address such concerns, *A Synchronous Process* applies a mixed method approach by drawing on analyses of media texts and trade discourse, media

⁹⁵ Erin Hill, "Recasting the Casting Director: Managed Change, Gendered Labor," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, eds. Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: New York University Press), 168-194; Mayer, *Below the Line*; Miranda Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, edited by Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 87-98.

Caldwell, *Production Culture*.

⁹⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture*; Mayer, *Below the Line*, 66-102.

⁹⁷ Stahl, *Unfree Masters*.

professionals' social media usage, and industry reports. It draws from Richard Johnson's circuit of culture model, which accounts for the relationships between texts, producers, audiences, and context.⁹⁸ This project was supplemented by participant observation research done in Austin during South by Southwest in 2014 and 2016, along with interviews conducted with World of Wonder's clearance supervisor and a catalogue representative at Warner Bros. in July 2014, though admittedly those experiences were preliminary experiments in field work that will require considerable more development to meaningfully contribute to this project's mixed-methods approach as it evolves from its current form. Thus the majority of this project results from extensive digging through the digital archives of trade and popular press, along with mining discourse from memoirs, feature profiles, roundtable discussions, DVD commentaries and bonus features, and other interpretable scraps of what Caldwell refers to as deep texts, or the ways that industries speak of themselves, with varying degrees of access, to make "dialogues and debates available in various multi-media formats ... for very different reasons than companies tied lucratively inside of the giant conglomerates."⁹⁹ Admittedly, such public disclosures must be met with discernment toward how industry professionals define and articulate their labor, as their words can often function as aggrandizing, contradictory, and unreliable forms of self-promotion. While these publicly disclosed deep texts may not inherently reveal more or less about industrial subjects and their work practices than embedded deep texts, which I will pursue in future iterations of this project, such public disclosures still have value when interpreted discursively. It draws upon such texts first to explore how broadcast television utilized new wave, alternative rock, and hip-hop for variety programming, sitcoms, and serial melodramas as expressions of the big four's attempts to compete with cable programming from the early 1980s to the late 2000s. It

⁹⁸ Richard Johnson, "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?," *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986/1987): 38-80.

⁹⁹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 35.

then marshals them to analyze the licensing of female rock and pop artists' recordings for serial melodramas and competition reality programming during the late 2000s and 2010s in relation to Viacom's acquisition of MTV and Logo as part of the conglomerate's larger strategy of acquiring market power within the cable television landscape through horizontal integration.

Chapter Overview

Each chapter of this dissertation historicizes the multi-channel transition to the post-network television through the lens of musicians' labor. It is organized around a guiding logic of "action," or the different ways in which television uses music. Each chapter is organized around distinct labor practices: score composition, booking and live performance, music placement and supervision, and the reuse of recordings for promotional purposes. In an effort to highlight, define, and investigate these categories, this dissertation either analyzes one illustrative program or places a few television shows in a comparative relationship in order to demonstrate their resonance in critical discussions about these professional responsibilities. Though there are assuredly other programs and production contexts worth analyzing, these television shows maximized my ability to demonstrate the musicking at work in composition, performance, placement, and reuse and the ways in which genre and identity ascribe cultural and industrial value to these musicians' contributions to television. The first section investigates broadcast television by evaluating how score and performance shaped the big four networks' original programming in the context of industrial convergence, while the second section looks at cable television's reliance upon recordings for narrative and reality programming by considering how two Viacom channels targeted niche audiences through music and lifestyle branding.

The first chapter considers Mark Mothersbaugh, Danny Elfman, and Angelo Badalamenti's work on CBS's *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* (1986-1990), FOX's *The Simpsons* (1989-),

and ABC's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017) which marked their transition from musicians to veteran television and film composers. Their contributions echoed new wave attempts to reconcile avant-garde sensibilities as professionals straddling industries in the process of being reshaped by deregulatory policies that facilitated media conglomeration during the 1980s. They also demonstrated affinities with creators Paul Reubens, Matt Groening, and David Lynch, who implicitly advanced hegemonic definitions of rock masculinity through their associations with punk and new wave as male music fans.

Extending the first chapter's investigation of network television's response to cable's ascent by foregrounding popular recording artists' contributions to contemporary riffs on broadcast fare, the second chapter investigates late-night talk shows' music booking practices by claiming that NBC's *Late Night* articulated its value as a space for musical discovery that coincides with the network's navigation of the multi-channel transition into the post-network era. In particular, it argues that alternative rock and hip-hop cultivated edge for NBC's late-night variety programming through subcultural white and black masculinities' signification of liveness and authenticity, with anxieties around cultural difference regarding identity and genre coming to bear upon late-night programming during the late 2000s. It accomplishes this by evaluating *Late Night*'s booking and performance decisions by contextualizing Roots' drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's brief tenure as the musical director and band leader for NBC's *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* (2009-2014) in relation to his predecessors, Paul Schaffer (1982-1993) and Max Weinberg (1993-2009), as well as his successor Fred Armisen (2014-).

Shifting the project's focus from network to cable programming, the third chapter investigates the supervision practices of MTV's *Awkward.* (2011-2016), a teen melodrama created by Lauren Iungerich that narrativizes a teenage girl's blog diary. It analyzes the work of

musicians Best Coast and Tegan and Sara, whose music was placed for the show and also served as guest supervisors. *Awkward* represents MTV's efforts to compete with cable television's widening landscape for scripted content. Thus, its alignment with female-oriented indie and electronic music was in accord with how MTV historically seeks to maximize its associations with musicians in order to legitimate its relationship to the music industries, a cornerstone of its channel brand even after it began distancing itself from video exhibition in the mid-1980s following Viacom's acquisition of the channel in 1984. Yet it was also in conflict with the channel's clear privileging of male viewership for programming and promotional purposes.

The fourth chapter extends the dissertation's investigation of Viacom by considering the conglomerate's subsequent acquisition of lifestyle-oriented cable channels like LGBT-oriented Logo TV, which launched in 2005. It analyzes its tentpole production, *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-present), which tethers drag culture to pop stardom by evaluating contestants' talents for reusing pop stars' recordings and collaborating on host RuPaul's music. The show extends this comparative relationship by inviting female singers and rappers to serve as guest judges and using their copyrighted recordings for its eliminatory lip sync contests. Many white and light-skinned cast members capitalize upon these professional skills and connections to mount their own recording careers. However, such accomplishments are unequally distributed to contestants of color, thus demonstrating how *Drag Race* uses the music industries as a problematic site for contestants' professionalization through pop music's, competition-based reality programming's, and LGBT media representation's deep-rooted neoliberalism.

A Synchronous Process mobilizes the word "synchronization" in order to claim that music is both a product of industrial synchronization and an expression of struggle between the television and music industries' asynchronous labor practices. It also avers that their utterances

matter to the audiences hailed by such compositional, performance, and placement decisions, and to the professionals whose music accompanies television programs. Musicians' contributions to the medium have historically benefitted the television industry, which has made musicians an attractive yet also often a peripheral, expendable, or disintegrated feature of television's landscape. Music's mediation is a site of struggle for professional recognition within television industrial practice, which scholars can better understand when tracing their work in composition, performance, and recording from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era.

Chapter One

Nuttier Establishments: Composing Cult Followings for *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks*

In a 1990 feature, *New York Times* contributor Larry Rohter claimed that composer Danny Elfman had an “unusual bifurcated career.”¹ Elfman was ostensibly promoting Tim Burton’s new film, *Edward Scissorhands*. The director was a fan of Elfman’s band Oingo Boingo and enlisted him to score his feature debut, *Pee-Wee’s Big Adventure*.² The film was a vehicle for the eponymous man-child and its creator Paul Reubens, who created his postmodern Howdy Doody avatar as a Groundlings repertory player.³ But after being hired on the strength of a demo recording he cut on a four-track player in his garage, its score also became Elfman’s calling card.⁴ He scored Burton’s next four films, contributed to *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse* (1986-1990), and wrote the theme to *The Simpsons* (1989-), a vehicle for cartoonist Matt Groening. But Elfman shrugged off Rohter’s romantic notions: “I just want to find interesting people to work with. Something where I can let my imagination go, that’s all I care about. What I want is to build a body of work, and whether it is on film or record matters less to me than the chance to do it.”⁵ Elfman’s peer Mark Mothersbaugh also did not separate his recording career from composing, which took off after Reubens asked him to co-write *Playhouse*’s theme song.⁶ As a founder of the conceptual rock outfit Devo, Mothersbaugh drew inspiration from Pop Art pioneer Andy

¹ Larry Rohter, “Batman? Bartman? Darkman? Elfman,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/09/movies/pop-music-batman-bartman-darkmanelfman.html?pagewanted=all>.

² Danny Elfman, “Tim Burton,” *Interview*, January 22, 2010. <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/tim-burton/>.

³ Brian Raftery, “Pee-Wee Turns 20,” *Entertainment Weekly*, September 1, 2006. <http://www.ew.com/article/2006/09/01/pee-wees-playhouse-turns-20>; Cassie Carpenter, “Playhouse Bound,” *Back Stage* 51 no. 2 (2010): 8-9.

⁴ Calum Marsh, “After a Hundred Scores, Danny Elfman is Still Proudly, Prolifically Weird,” June 30, 2015. <http://www.villagevoice.com/music/after-a-hundred-scores-danny-elfman-is-still-proudly-prolifically-weird-7305537>.

⁵ Rohter, “Batman? Bartman? Darkman? Elfman.”

⁶ Caseen Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee’s Playhouse: The Untold, Unauthorized, and Unpredictable Story of a Pop Phenomenon* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2011).

Warhol.⁷ Furthermore, Devo originally signed with Warner Bros. Records in 1976, then an arm of Warner Communications, which also distributed *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* through its film division. Thus Mothersbaugh believed that debates over art and commerce ignored the financial realities of musicians' labor. As he told *Adweek*, “[y]ou’re not being honest if you’ve signed with a record company and you’re pretending you’re not a commercial product.”⁸

Unlike Mothersbaugh and Elfman, *Twin Peaks* composer Angelo Badalamenti had a conservatory background. The Brooklyn native attended the Eastman School of Music and then the Manhattan School of Music.⁹ In 1973 Badalamenti began scoring films, but was unable to gain much traction and worked as an arranger and songwriter.¹⁰ Nearly a decade later, producer Fred Caruso hired him as actress Isabella Rossellini’s vocal coach during production on David Lynch’s *Blue Velvet*.¹¹ When Badalamenti arrived, there was no score. But Lynch was impressed by his progress with Rossellini and requested a visit. During their meeting, Badalamenti interpreted Lynch’s descriptions of character and environment by improvising melodies on the keyboard. “And—boom—[Lynch] would start seeing pictures.”¹² From then on, Badalamenti was integral to Lynch’s pre-production process. After one session Lynch and screenwriter Mark Frost developed the pitch for *Twin Peaks*, which they sold to ABC’s programming vice-president Chad Hoffman in the summer of 1988 toward the end of the Writers Guild of America strike.¹³

Ultimately Elfman’s, Mothersbaugh’s, and Badalamenti’s television work was indicative of the various commercial shifts they began to navigate as composers working across media

⁷ Mae Anderson, “Mark Mothersbaugh: On The Spot.” *Adweek* 45 (2004): 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Inside Twin Peaks*, October 6, 1990.

¹⁰ Bryan Reesman, “Composer: Angelo Badalamenti—A Passion for Improvisation,” *Mix* 30, no. 1 (2006): 54.

¹¹ John Rockwell, “The Music That Haunt’s ‘Twin Peaks,’” *New York Times*, July 1, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/01/arts/pop-view-the-music-that-haunts-twin-peaks.html>.

¹² Reesman, “A Passion for Improvisation,” 56.

¹³ Steve Weinstein, “The Other Peak,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1990. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-29/entertainment/ca-1318_1_twin-peaks.

industries as both an outgrowth of their creative endeavors and as an expectation of their labor as musicians during the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. Their contributions to these programs allowed CBS, Fox, and ABC to develop original programming that revisited children's variety shows, the family sitcom, and the soap opera as holdovers from the broadcast era that scratched familiar itches for Cold War Americana's wholesome kitsch, aestheticized consumerism, and paranoiac definitions of citizenship and family. Aided by these composers' contributions, network executives worked in tandem with record labels and multiple third-party licensees to pursue ancillary markets and convergent ventures through tie-in merchandising as products of corporate synergy that would scaffold the organization of the media industries and influence music's mediation on post-network television. Such projects frequently required toggling between broadcast and cable television. For example, Reubens created a comedy special for HBO during the early 1980s before CBS became *Playhouse*'s home.¹⁴ A few years later, *The Simpsons* partnered with MTV to promote its first compilation.¹⁵ These musicians' involvement with *Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks* illustrated how network television—specifically two Big Three stalwarts and an upstart—responded to cable's formal and demographic shifts. Finally, Warner Bros. was an integral player during the multi-channel transition. The label signed Devo, repackaged Elfman's film score output, and released soundtracks for *Twin Peaks*.

Yet these shows and their scores evinced ambivalence toward the resurgence of post-war patriotism and nostalgia throughout the 1980s. On the one hand, each program infused its respective televisual genre with the postmodern sensibilities of irony, surrealism, and intertextuality to create their own distinct styles and ardent fandoms. They rounded out network daytime and primetime programming schedules during a cultural moment defined by

¹⁴ John J. O'Connor, "Gentle Lunacy Rules 'Pee-Wee's Playhouse,'" *New York Times* 136 (1986): H27(N), H27 (L).

¹⁵ Marcy Magiera, "Simpsons Got Blues," *Advertising Age* 61, no. 49 (1990): 8.

conservatism's reactionary appeals to "normalcy" and the free market. Yet these composers' contributions to their respective programs' cult followings also hinted at the heteromasculine overtures frequently embedded in the programs' intended address and its male creators' self-perception as underappreciated subcultural auteurs. "We're supposed to be *artists*," Elfman once said of his profession. As a result, "we all seem to behave like male cats in an alley in heat with one female ... Maybe it has to do with nobody ever giving me credit for doing anything."¹⁶ But composing provided a reliable revenue stream and a creative outlet as these men approached middle age and welcomed composition's relative security compared to the touring band's precarious existence.¹⁷ As Mothersbaugh explained to Jon Burlingame, "[w]hen you're scoring, you can work all day and go home ... The only way I would go back to being a rock 'n' roller again would be if I could also be 20 again. It's a lifestyle and a job for 20-year-olds."¹⁸ It also gave them opportunities to assert their authority by grooming talent, as Badalamenti and Lynch did with vocalist Julee Cruise, a venture that resulted in her signing a contract with Warner Bros. and serving as an avatar for *Twin Peaks*' doomed heroine Laura Palmer. In other words, these composers critiqued the ideological twining of business and politics while creating products as media industry professionals that mimicked and benefitted from such commingling.

Thus, this chapter offers a comparative analysis of Mothersbaugh's, Elfman's, and Badalamenti's participation as composers on *Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks* to make the case for how their efforts, particularly in the creation of score and theme music, meaningfully contribute to a critical understanding of early post-network broadcast history. Each show

¹⁶ Lukas Kendall, "From *Pee-Wee* to *Batman* to *Two Film a Year*," *Film Score Monthly* 62 (1995): 14.

¹⁷ Melena Ryzik, "Danny Elfman Brings Music From Tim Burton's Films to Lincoln Center," *New York Times*, July 2, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/03/arts/music/danny-elfman-brings-music-from-tim-burtons-films-to-lincoln-center.html?_r=0.

¹⁸ John Burlingame, "You Shoot, They Score," *Variety* 393, no. 4 (2004): 84.

demonstrates how score and theme songs were asynchronously woven into network television and the ancillary market during this period. It also makes the case for how musicians served as instruments of convergence during this time, as all three programs relied extensively on ancillary marketing and merchandising that differently integrated their labor into the paratexts that encircled and extended their respective programs and served as metrics for fan engagement and commercial viability. Finally, these musicians reflected the artistic visions of their programs' creators. Despite their stature in the television industry, these men fancied themselves outsiders who entered into the world of network programming from new wave's, experimental theater's, alternative comics', and experimental cinema's side doors and struggled with its commercial directives and collaborative work practices. For Mothersbaugh, this meant resynchronizing his composition practices as a rock keyboardist within *Playhouse's* compressed production cycle for Reubens. For Elfman, this meant dashing off a melody on commission from Groening that became one of television's most indelible theme songs. For Badalamenti, this meant coordinating with Lynch's mercurial filmmaking process. For all three composers, this eventually resulted in the uneven integration of their work into these three programs' various merchandising efforts.

During this transitional period, the broadcast networks were trying to create their own sense of edge but were not necessarily sure how to go about cultivating it. As a result, executives at CBS, Fox, and ABC went about the business of tapping subcultural figures from other mediums to provide it. This chapter claims that this sense of edge was implicitly filtered through white male creators' fandom toward punk and new wave, and specifically toward primarily white male artists who were hired onto these productions to transpose their creative visions into original music and theme songs that would support them. That is not to say that such auteurist gestures were deliberately sexist, nor is this chapter making essentialist claims about punk and

new wave's male fandom in general or within these specific production contexts. Rather, it claims that the affinities between television creators and composers were organized around their shared musical tastes, which centralized their identities as white male musicians and fans by limiting women's contributions to reinforce Reubens', Groening's, and Lynch's authorship.

Jerking Back and Forth

Mark Mothersbaugh's, Danny Elfman's, and Angelo Badalamenti's forays into television scoring must be filtered through the lenses of convergence and postmodernism. These are aspects that many scholars have identified in their analyses of *Twin Peaks*' formal daring, transmedia storytelling, and Web-based fan communities; *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*'s "thrift-store" aesthetic, implicit queer masculinity, and ludic anarchy; and the complex reception of *The Simpsons*' knotty skein of satirical gestures, intertextual references, and paratextual conduits.¹⁹ In particular, this chapter follows from Kathryn Kalinak's analysis of noise's thematic presence in Badalamenti's *Twin Peaks* score and Martin Kutnowski's in-depth textual reading of *The Simpsons*' overture as a symptom of its ironic representation of American suburbia.²⁰ Yet there is little scholarship on the labor behind this music or its inconsistent merchandising, both of which reflect post-network television's uneven attempts to use popular music to bridge industries.

¹⁹ Jimmie L. Reeves et al., "Postmodernism and Television: Speaking of *Twin Peaks*," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1994): 173-195; Christy Desmet, "The Canonization of Laura Palmer," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1994): 93-108; Henry Jenkins, "'Do You Enjoy Making the Rest of Us Feel Stupid': alt.tv.twinpeaks, the Trickster Author, and Viewer Mastery," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1994): 51-69; John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Henry Jenkins, "'Going Bonkers!': Children, Play, and Pee-wee," *Camera Obscura* 6, vol. 2, no. 17 (1988): 169-193; Jonathan Gray, *Watching With The Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

²⁰ Kathryn Kalinak, "'Disturbing the Guests with This Racket': Music and *Twin Peaks*," in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1994): 82-92; Martin Kutnowski, "'Trope and Irony in *The Simpsons*' Overture," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 5 (2008): 599-616.

These issues need more careful consideration in order for scholars to better understand music's role in shaping *Playhouse's*, *The Simpsons*'s, and *Twin Peaks*' industrial circumstances.

During the 1960s, Hollywood film's scoring practices changed due to the compilation soundtrack's ascent and popular music's presence as a key component of major motion picture storytelling.²¹ In particular, primarily male filmmakers and studio patrons used their associations with these movements to embolden cinematic gestures toward auteurism, youth culture, stylized depictions of sex and violence, Leftist politics, and popular music.²² As a result, several male rock musicians began composing film music. In 1971, singer-songwriters Leonard Cohen and Cat Stevens provided original music for Robert Altman's revisionist Western *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* and Hal Ashby's macabre May-December romance *Harold and Maude*. These collaborations required Cohen to enter into a licensing arrangement with Columbia Records and Warner Bros., while Stevens worked on commission for Paramount.²³ Such cross-pollination intensified during the 1980s. In addition to Elfman's partnership with Tim Burton, an increasing number of musicians associated with punk and new wave wrote film scores, including Talking Heads' leader David Byrne. His band signed with Warner subsidiary Sire Records in 1976, which allowed Byrne to pursue other outside projects. By the late 1980s, Byrne mounted a solo career and launched the Luaka Bop imprint, with Warner Bros. handling distribution.²⁴ He also let his pre-existing relationship with filmmaker Jonathan Demme help Warner Bros. coordinate multiple holdings. After directing the Heads' concert documentary *Stop Making Sense* Demme

²¹ Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²² Julie Hubbert, "Whatever Happened to Great Movie Music?": *Cinéma Vérité* and Hollywood Film Music of the Early 1970s," *American Music* 21, no. 2 (2003): 180-213; Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

²³ Ed Gonzalez, "McCabe & Mrs. Miller," *Slant*, May 27, 2002. <http://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/review/mccabe-and-mrs-miller>; Nick Dawson, *Being Hal Ashby: Life of a Hollywood Rebel* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

²⁴ Chris Morris, "Byrne's Luaka Bop Imprint Expands Its Musical Turf," *Billboard* 103, no. 43 (1991): 9.

hired Byrne to score *Married to the Mob* and supervise its soundtrack, which Warner Bros. used as an opportunity to revive the dormant Reprise label and flailing distributor Orion Pictures.²⁵

Some recording artists were also pursuing composition work in television music at this time, for which Ron Rodman offers a series of useful analytical frameworks endemic to the medium's sonic register.²⁶ Providing such structural mechanisms is no easy feat, as Rodman argues that television is inherently messy and that its scoring practices are simultaneously distinct and reliant upon musical traditions it inherited or borrowed from both film and radio.²⁷ Like film, television is a visual medium that is immersive and narrative-driven. Like radio, television is associated with seriality, live performance, and the public good, as both mediums were "free" to all citizens through the mandates of American broadcasting, which relied heavily on corporate sponsorship. As a result, American television was an inherently commercial medium and its music tended to be shorter, fragmentary, hybridist, repetitive, supplemental to narrative, and reliant upon characterization as ways to ingratiate itself into a show's storyworld and a programming block's generic and commercial regulations.

Thus Rodman identifies the centrality of theme songs and leitmotifs to television music. The term most often used to describe this function is "leitmotif," which Justin London compares to "proper names in language" in his definition: "a particular musical fragment [that] comes to be associated with a particular place, object, or (most often) character."²⁸ Rodman claims that the leitmotif and the theme song contain both denotative and connotative properties that are reinforced through their associative musical style topics, which are used to link music to

²⁵ George Plasketes, *Warren Zevon: Desperado of Los Angeles* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Nina J. Easton, "Whither Orion?: The Last of the Mini-Major Studios Finds Itself at a Crossroads," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1990. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-19/entertainment/ca-363_1_studio-executives.

²⁶ Ron Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Justin London, "Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score," in *Music and Cinema*, eds. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000): 89.

nonmusical ideas, objects, and references.²⁹ As a result, leitmotifs signify “in more than one way. Moreover, television has the added advantage over film of utilizing its theme music not only to signify the narrative action, but also to consistently remind the viewer of the program they are watching [television],” two mutually constitutive aspects upon which *Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks* would profit through the creation of indelible and increasingly commodifiable theme songs that would ably straddle their respective extra-, intra-, and diegetic realms.³⁰

In addition to television music’s particular signification and narrative strategies, Rodman claims that television also relied upon and reflected the media it preceded and that radio and film also adapted to it instead of simply viewing it as an industrial rival, which in turn shaped the medium’s evolution over time. For example, early television “relied on the live theater and a sort of radio-with-pictures format, complete with the fixed program time slots and corporate sponsorship system of its parent medium.”³¹ But as the 1950s progressed, film studios began to perceive television’s commercial potential and created subsidiaries that produced and sold programs to the networks. As a result, “[t]hese new studio-produced programs resembled movies, complete with the cinematic codes of production and reception.”³² Yet many of the composers associated with B-movie westerns and sci-fi adapted more easily to television’s compressed production schedule and budgetary restraints. This made TV composition a hospitable work environment for intrepid rock musicians like Mothersbaugh who absorbed punk’s musical immediacy and do-it-yourself ethos and created a space for musicians like him that were not equally available to his female counterparts at the time.

²⁹ Ibid., 112-121.

³⁰ Ibid., 131.

³¹ Ibid., 103.

³² Ibid.

Of course, these artists were not only contributors to industrial convergence; they were commercial products. This was due, in part, to their associations with and proximity to new wave and the movement's conflicted relationship with punk. New wave originally circulated in the early 1970s among music critics as a descriptor for bands like the Velvet Underground and the New York Dolls who used rock to pursue thematic interests in transgressive subcultural practices around gender nonconformity, sexual hedonism, non-traditional living arrangements, and recreational drug use that would influence American and British punk. However it was reclaimed in the late 1970s by Sire Records' founder Seymour Stein, who used it as a marketing strategy by applying it to acts like the Talking Heads to distance them from the New York punk scene in order to protect his enterprise from the financial risk of the moral panics surrounding bands like the Sex Pistols, who were banned in the United Kingdom for their commercially indigestible on- and off-stage behavior.³³ Though bands like Devo and Oingo Boingo and figures like performer Paul Reubens, cartoonist Matt Groening, and filmmaker David Lynch, seemed to challenge cross-industrial practice, they did more to create new commodities for music and television.

In his book-length study on new wave, popular music scholar Theo Cateforis identifies modernity as the musical movement's defining characteristic. New wave formed out of "the dissatisfaction that many musicians and fans felt with the rock status quo" after the 1970s, specifically with prog's theatrical phallocentrism, mainstream rock's corporate bloat, and punk's squandered radical potential. Such developments happened coterminously with new wave artists' ambivalent reception of disco, giddy references to '50s Americana like B-movie scores and the '60s British Invasion, and optimism toward multimedia forms like music video as meaningful expressions of bands' creativity. Thus, Cateforis claims that "the modern is also 'relational,'

³³ Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?: Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 25.

rupturing with the immediate past and often turning to a more distant past as an inspiration of rebellion.”³⁴ He identifies three modern historical eras as crucial to the formation of new wave due to their associations “with profound technological advancements that provoked responses both celebratory and cautionary”: the emergence of metropolitan cultural centers from 1880 to 1930, the rise of middle-class affluence and youth culture during the late 1950s and mid-1960s, and the rise in deindustrialization and globalization that marked the first half of the 1980s. He also posits that these periods were not self-contained, and that new wave was a movement swept up in the past’s undertow. He demonstrates new wave’s modernity through its manipulation of various technologies. Cateforis identifies the evolution of studios, which became smaller and more compartmentalized in design, and recording techniques, which became more heavily dependent on digital technology, in relation to the synthesizer’s emblematic function with new wave.³⁵ At the turn of the 1980s, synthesizers became increasingly portable, inexpensive, and user-friendly. Notably, Mothersbaugh, Elfman, and Badalamenti were all keyboardists who relied heavily on synthesizers as composers. This affected the sounds they made, which were strange and artificial, and how they were integrated into these shows and surrounding paratexts.

Yet such innovations often resulted in the compression of work and leisure time, the routinization of daily life due to advances in communication technologies and transportation that made correspondence and travel more efficient, and dynamic shifts in sex roles within marriage and family life that made modern life an uncertain proposition for men in particular. Thus Cateforis claims as that as a movement, new wave was anxious of progress in highly gendered ways. Such anxiety was characterized by gestures of white male nervousness, specifically embodied by Mothersbaugh’s and Byrne’s robotic, repressed, and agitated performance styles.

³⁴ Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave?*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 151-181.

Cateforis links their displays to medical discourses on neurasthenia that surfaced during the Victorian era.³⁶ Such reactions against modernity's threat to hegemonic gender norms mirror Keir Keightley's claim that developments in phonographic technology during the 1950s facilitated men's retreat into record collecting to self-segregate at home. As a result:

[H]i-fi's transformation of domestic space, either through loud playback volumes which repelled wives out of shared areas, or through mental transportation away from domestic realities, was a key component of the masculinization of home audio equipment during the period. High fidelity represented a moment of masculine involvement not only in the arrangement of the domestic interior, but also in commodity consumption.³⁷

Thus these musicians and the program creators they served, who all came of age and began cultivating their tastes and reference points during the post-war era, replicated some of these heteromasculine symptoms by using their esoteric fandom as a resource. This was particularly true for Reubens, Groening, and Lynch, who enlisted Mothersbaugh, Elfman, and Badalamenti to express their esoteric fandom and to create original music that infused their shows' post-modern sensibilities toward television's past. Of course, women and girls were fans of these performers, programs, and the subcultures from which they emerged, as were their queer and non-white counterparts. But just as cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie observed that many of her peers overlooked girls' participation in music subcultures because their fandom was removed from public life and thus perceived as fickle consumerism relative to boys' supposedly more "authentic" engagement,³⁸ the *orientation* of these shows and paratexts privileged their

³⁶ Ibid., 74-75.

³⁷ Keir Keightley, "'Turn It Down' She Shrieked: Gender, Domestic Space, and High Fidelity, 1948-59," *Popular Music* 15, no. 2 (1996): 171-172.

³⁸ Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," *Feminism and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 13.

male creators fandoms. A set of masculinist assumptions and embedded in the creators' fan practices, which privileged their participation in new wave and punk rock and their preoccupation with music that evoked those two subgenres' thematic investment in youthfulness and nostalgia as extensions of their sense of subcultural belonging as white male music fans. This is not to suggest that the paratexts and the theme songs were themselves inherently masculinist. But by virtue of the fan cultures surrounding the production of those programs, there is an assumed privileging of white men's identification with punk and new wave. Such gestures of affinity mirror Suzanne Scott's discussion of the emergence of the fanboy auteur within transmedia storytelling as "a key player in how convergence culture is shaped."³⁹ Thus, through the employment of these musicians, the marginalization of female vocalists' labor on *Playhouse* and *Twin Peaks*, and the minimization of women's participation on *The Simpsons*, these case studies illustrate how implicit masculinist assumptions around male above-the-line creative talent's rock fandom undergirded composition practices during the multi-channel transition.

In addition, many bands associated with new wave like the Talking Heads, Devo, and Oingo Boingo were signed with labels that were subsidiaries of or had distribution deals with music divisions of multinational conglomerates with sizable cross-industrial holdings. Thus, it is worth considering how these musicians navigated the complex ownership structures in which they worked. For example, in an effort to promote their Warner Bros. signing, Devo launched Club Devo in the late 1970s. The mail-order catalogue self-consciously hawked retro merchandise—pins, 3D glasses, and logo-emblazoned t-shirts—underlined by tongue-in-cheek ad copy that mocked the expendability built into the band's branded suite of products. In doing so, Devo mimicked how many post-war advertising campaigns used disposability as "a key

³⁹ Suzanne Scott, "The Trouble with Transmediation: Fandom's Negotiation of Transmedia Storytelling Systems," *Spectator* 30, no. 1 (2010): 33.

component of the era's marketing and promotional tactics, which were based around a strategy of planned obsolescence."⁴⁰ In other words, Devo used retro kitsch as a marketing strategy. *Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks* sought to puncture nostalgia while also capitalizing upon it by hiring musicians to compose marketable music that signified the ghosts in the television and recording industries' machines. It was also within these contexts that then-contemporary permutations of rock music like punk and new wave would develop. Thus while convergence established the industrial and economic parameters around which these programs were made, postmodernism best encapsulated the sensibility it hoped to achieve through quirky fare with subcultural cache meant to attract a smaller yet supposedly more discerning, loyal, and implicitly male viewership. The term has been ascribed to various historical periods since the advent of industrialization but is most closely associated with the compression of time and space shaping media's production and reception during the late 20th century.⁴¹ Frederic Jameson argues that postmodernism is best understood as the result of late capitalism's tireless efforts to commodify all aspects of existence, including childhood and nostalgia.⁴²

Media studies recognizes television as a medium, an industry, and an ideological tool, particularly for its ability to signify an idealized past that never actually existed. One scholar especially associated with this perception is Lynn Spigel, who notes that the ascendance of television in the United States is inextricably linked to the post-war period's hegemonic sociopolitical directives by claiming that "[t]elevision's installation into the American home took place at a time when domesticity was a central preoccupation of the burgeoning middle class ...

⁴⁰ Ibid., 102.

⁴¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989).

⁴² Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

creating a revitalization of the nuclear family.”⁴³ However, Elspeth Probyn notes that such mediations on the past “pull us back to a space that cannot be revisited; they throw us into a present becoming, profoundly disturbing any chronological ordering of life and being” that transforms nostalgia “not as a guarantee of memory but precisely as an errant logic that always goes astray” and destabilizes origins altogether.⁴⁴ These shows gave their home networks opportunities to manipulate familiar televisual genres while highlighting *Playhouse*’s domestic psychedelia and naughty innuendo, *The Simpsons*’ aesthetic and comedic crudeness, and *Twin Peaks*’ arthouse chiaroscuro of pastoral Americana and pulp fiction for commercial purposes.

If television was the hearth for the modern home, then music contributed to people’s decision to congregate around it and elbow at its parameters. Murray Forman argues that popular music was “essential to television’s public acceptance and the industry’s commercial viability,” particularly because it allowed the emerging medium to pursue a “broad range of genres and performance styles” as producers, screenwriters, and technical personnel developed narrative visual aesthetics distinct from yet reliant upon radio’s aural storytelling and public address.⁴⁵ This experimental spirit informed musicians’ contributions to broadcast television during the mid-1980s as network executives and creative talent were reacting to cable television’s artistic, cultural, and economic possibilities. As a result, Rodman avers that “television music participate[s] in the postmodern agenda. Television is certainly a fragmented medium, broadcasting a constant flow of diverse texts ... [Thus] the practice of composing television music represents not so much a break with the past as a continuation and adaptation of music

⁴³ Lynn Spiegel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 32-33.

⁴⁴ Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 103.

⁴⁵ Murray Forman, *One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 10.

broadcasting in predecessor media.”⁴⁶ During the 1980s, television music began to evince postmodernism in part through its adherence to modernity. According to Rodman, *Playhouse* and *Twin Peaks* demonstrated how the medium is “modernist in its striving to be original, to build on what has come before it in a new, fresh, and different way. At the same time, television is, as it has always been, postmodern in its borrowings from every other media possible and in its reflexivity.”⁴⁷ In particular, Rodman highlights postmodern music’s use of irony, its disrespect toward the boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow styles, and tendencies toward musical quotation. These were hallmarks of Mothersbaugh’s, Elfman’s, and Badalamenti’s work. Tim Anderson argues that the continued interest in early rock ‘n’ roll and novelty music resulted from kitsch’s endurance in the reception of early popular recordings and their packaging, especially when held at a remove from their original historical moment.⁴⁸ For example, Anderson nods to the ardent fan cultures that formed around figures like Juan García Esquivel and Martin Denny, composers best known for their pop instrumentals from the early 1960s, which borrowed liberally from a multitude of generic traditions and cultures and was often classified as “exotica” or “lounge music.”⁴⁹ Though it fell out of fashion by the end of the decade, this strain of cosmopolitan pop would influence Mothersbaugh’s and Elfman’s television composition work. Mothersbaugh cited Denny as a direct influence on *Playhouse*’s music, while Elfman used Groening’s affinity for Esquivel’s music as a reference point for his composition of the *Simpsons* theme song. In addition, Badalamenti would draw upon rock music from the 1950s and 60s as an

⁴⁶ Ron Rodman, *Tuning In*, 277.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁸ Tim J. Anderson. *Making Easy Listening: Material Culture and Postwar American Recording* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172-174.

influence for his work on *Twin Peaks* with Lynch and Cruise. It is upon these contributions, and their complex relationship with the past, that we now direct our attention.

A Crazy, Mixed-Up Place

As a band, Devo believed that government and corporate entities' controlled and bent citizens' political will through ownership, overwork, and fear-mongering to engender conformity and contempt toward difference, largely in reaction to the trauma they experienced as college students during the Kent State shootings in 1970.⁵⁰ They took their name from "de-evolution," a concept that describes the processes by which species regress as a reaction against technological progress. This inspired the band's "descent into onstage infantilism," as Barbara Graustark described one concert.⁵¹ Devo were known for tantrum-like performances, lyrical absurdism, and an iconic look consisting of matching hazmat suits and "energy dome" hats. Bassist Gerald Casale acquired the band's uniforms from a janitorial supply company he worked for at the time. "We wanted to look like a machine or an army onstage," Mothersbaugh claimed. "We felt that the real mindless uniform was rock's blue jeans."⁵² The band's sound was equally abrasive. Their original drummer, Alan Myers, played difficult time signatures that the rest of the band struggled to keep pace with while Mothersbaugh integrated discordant synth patterns into an otherwise "standard" rock line-up. These two elements resulted in the band developing "this very precise music like James Brown turned into a robot," as Casale would later describe it.⁵³

Devo was visually and commercially oriented from its inception, and in particular drew inspiration from television, the primary mass medium of their childhood. By Mothersbaugh's

⁵⁰ Kevin C. Smith, *Recombo DNA: The Story of Devo, or How the 60s Became the 80s* (London: Jawbone Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Barbara Graustark, "Devo's Primal Pop," *Newsweek* 92, no. 18 (1978): 77.

⁵² Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2005), 43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

estimation, their early sound as a trio was “‘The Flintstones’ meets ‘The Jetsons,’” an acknowledgement of Hanna-Barbera cartoons’ peppy theme and incidental music as an influence on their sound that gestured toward their later composition work, which became common reference points for *Playhouse* and *The Simpsons* in particular.⁵⁴ Casale and Mothersbaugh began collaborating on video installations that fused their shared interest in experimental film, Pop Art, and television as a means for a creative outlet from their limited opportunities for recreational entertainment. Such thematic interests eventually inspired Mothersbaugh’s songwriting after he became obsessed with a 1974 Burger King jingle concocted by advertising agency BBDO that set the lyric “Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, special orders don’t upset us” to the melody of German composer Johann Pachelbel’s “Canon in D.”⁵⁵ Mothersbaugh liked that the commercial took “a beautiful piece of music and turn[ed] it into an ad for hamburgers” and created several generic reinterpretations of it in order to build on its initial popularity. This approach to music was more interesting to Mothersbaugh “than hippies or punks screaming about anarchy or revolution. I watched the hippies become commodified and turned into hip capitalists—and the punks, you just watched them kind of dwindle away.”⁵⁶

Early on, Mothersbaugh and Casale also applied what they learned in class by producing, directing, and editing shorts and video installations that they would project behind them on stage during their concerts. These amateur productions helped Casale and Mothersbaugh create a template for Devo’s multimedia approach to pop song craft, performance, and packaging. They also experimented with music video, and recruited their classmate Chuck Statler to direct

⁵⁴ Curtis Ross, “Devo’s Co-Founder Now Excited By Future,” *Tampa Tribune* July 15, 2010. <http://www.tbo.com/movies/devos-co-founder-now-excited-by-future-47368>.

⁵⁵ Philip H. Dougherty, “Advertising: Burger King to Leave B.B.D.O.,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1976. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E05E1DA143FE334BC4953DFB166838D669EDE>.

⁵⁶ Randall Roberts, “Are You Not Devo? You Are Mutato,” *L.A. Weekly*, December 5, 2007. <http://www.laweekly.com/music/are-you-not-devo-you-are-mutato-2151061>.

treatments for their manic cover of “Secret Agent Man” and an early original, “Jocko Homo.” They would also play characters during their stage performances including Booji Boy, a feral infant that originated from Mothersbaugh’s childhood drawings. Mothersbaugh’s creation became an emblematic figure for the band, appearing in many of Devo’s early music videos and merchandise⁵⁷ and serving as the nominal protagonist for the band’s first short film, which generated major label interest. Filmed in Kent, Akron, and Cuyahoga Falls, *The Truth about De-Evolution* is a surrealist retelling of the band’s origin story that premiered at the Ann Arbor Film Festival.⁵⁸ After its premiere, Statler booked music video jobs for Elvis Costello, Nick Lowe, and Prince,⁵⁹ while Devo screened *De-Evolution* before their concerts and received invitations to play in New York.⁶⁰ David Bowie tried to find the band label representation after they hired a young woman from Akron to solicit the English singer with their demo tape after a show.⁶¹ Brian Eno produced their first album. Neil Young helped facilitate their 1977 Warner Bros. signing, and also hired them to contribute original music to his 1982 feature *Human Highway*.⁶²

Devo was not a high seller for Warner Bros., but the label was able to benefit from the band’s cult following by booking high-profile television appearances on variety programs like NBC’s *Saturday Night Live* in 1978. More importantly, Warner Bros. did not lose money due to Devo’s low overhead costs. The band produced their own records, developed their own merchandise, and often handled their own bookings, which kept the label from hiring and

⁵⁷ Adam Lerner, *Mark Mothersbaugh: Myopia* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014).

⁵⁸ *The Complete Truth about De-Evolution* (Hollywood: Rhino Records, 2003).

⁵⁹ “Chuck Statler: Before MTV,” *Museum of Modern Art*, November 2, 2006. <http://www.moma.org/calendar/film/874?locale=en>; Tony Best, “Prince Tapped ‘Godfather of the Music Video’ Chuck Statler to Helm the Ill-Fated Film *The Second Coming*,” *Wax Poetics*, April 21, 2016. <http://waxpoetics.com/features/articles/prince-second-coming-ill-fated-film/>.

⁶⁰ Dave Segal, “Devo’s Duty Now for the Past,” *The Stranger* (November 5, 2009): 35-36.

⁶¹ Mark Mothersbaugh, “Interview with Adam Lerner,” SXSW 2016 Conference. March 17, 2016.

⁶² Andy Greene, “Neil Young’s ‘Human Highway’ to Nationwide Theatrical Release,” *Rolling Stone*, January 14, 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/neil-youngs-human-highway-to-get-nationwide-theatrical-release-20160114>.

charging for third-party promoters, booking agents, and marketing representatives to generate interest for the band and its seemingly narrow commercial appeal. In Mothersbaugh's words, "[w]e weren't pushing Prince out of the limelight or anything. But we stayed in the black, and didn't cost them anything."⁶³ The label's hands-off approach allowed Devo to self-produce several music videos during this period. One such clip was "Whip It," the second single from 1980's *Freedom of Choice*. Casale directed the video, based on an S&M pictorial Mothersbaugh saw in *Dude Magazine*, and the band covered its \$15,000 budget.⁶⁴ But the label's perception of Devo changed after the video began receiving traction in early 1981. First, its depiction of Mothersbaugh whipping off a woman's clothes generated controversy for its depiction of female nudity and masochism. Comedian Lily Tomlin decried "Whip It" as misogynistic and refused to host opposite them on NBC's musical variety show *The Midnight Special*, resulting in the band's rescinded invitation.⁶⁵ But MTV put "Whip It" in heavy rotation, largely because the nascent cable channel needed content to fill air time and keep its license. Thus both MTV and Warner Bros. profited from Devo's supposedly subversive image, though only in the short term.

Warner Bros. wanted Devo to replicate the single's commercial success; Devo disagreed. According to Mothersbaugh, "[w]e didn't think about writing pop songs, we thought about what we wanted to talk about. We didn't write love songs, we didn't write party songs. We wrote songs that related to the bigger message of Devo. And so, in a way 'Whip It' was the beginning of the end."⁶⁶ Despite initial optimism, Devo soured on MTV. "We had ideas earlier about music television and sound and vision eclipsing rock 'n' roll to where visual audio artists—people who

⁶³ David M. Ewalt, "Mark Mothersbaugh on Making Music for TV, Games, and Film," *Forbes*, March 6, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidewalt/2014/03/06/mark-mothersbaugh-scores-tv-game-film/#403098464721>.

⁶⁴ Carl Wiser, "Interview: Devo," *Song Facts*, December 1, 2003. <http://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/devo/>.

⁶⁵ Will Harris, "Interview: Gerald Casale of Devo," *Rhino*, June 18, 2015. <http://www.rhino.com/article/interview-gerald-casale-of-dev>.

⁶⁶ Ewalt, "Mark Mothersbaugh on Making Music for TV, Games, and Film."

were multimedia artists—would become more prominent in pop culture,” Mothersbaugh told Harvey Kubernick.⁶⁷ “But because it didn’t happen enough, the lawyers had already started to figure out a way to turn it into Home Shopping Network. What we were doing was sort of reduced to baby pictures for record companies. Just a three-and-a-half minute commercial.”⁶⁸ To Mothersbaugh, “[R]ock ‘n’ roll bought MTV” and labels prioritized “stupid bands that didn’t have a vision—so the less vision an artist had, the more money they threw into the pot so that they could make a bigger, more extravagant video.”⁶⁹ The band released three more albums with Warner Bros. to declining sales before they were dropped after 1984’s *Shout*.

Ultimately, the company’s decision proved advantageous for Mothersbaugh. In 1983, he and Casale wrote the theme song to *Doctor Detroit*, a vehicle for *Saturday Night Live* alum Dan Aykroyd that talent agent Bernie Brillstein produced independently through his own film studio. The Universal-owned MCA subsidiary Backstreet Records released the soundtrack, which also gave the band the opportunity to work for hire on another media company’s product. Such an experience would eventually be formative for Mothersbaugh’s transition into composition work.⁷⁰ In addition, Devo released the two-part *E-Z Listening Cassettes* compilation series in 1981 and 1984, which reinterpreted earlier singles like “Gates of Steel” and “Girl U Want” as instrumentals that drew heavily from elevator Muzak, telephone hold music, 70s New Age, and the work of Spaghetti western composer Ennio Morricone.⁷¹ The second installment was a joint venture to promote Warner Bros. reissues imprint, Rykodisc, which it launched in 1983.

⁶⁷ Harvey Kubernick, *Hollywood Shack Job: Rock Music in Film and On Your Screen* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 197.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Roberts, “Are You Not Devo? You Are Mutato.”

⁷⁰ Richard Cook, “Singles,” *New Musical Express*, June 25, 1983, 27.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The instrumental series also captured the interest of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* creator Paul Reubens, who was in the process of developing a variety series for CBS to capitalize on the character's success with recurring stints on *Late Night with David Letterman*, multiple specials with HBO, and a feature film for Warner Bros.⁷² The project also gave the network an opportunity to differentiate itself by developing a children's program during the "Saturday morning ghetto," a derisive industry term that described the low estimation that network executives gave to daytime kids' programming but was nonetheless desirable to advertisers.⁷³ Despite CBS facing reduced revenues as it returned from summer hiatus for 1986's fall schedule, "[w]e have got to distinguish ourselves from what is on syndication," CBS's vice-president of children's programming Judy Price proclaimed in a *New York Times* article promoting the series' premiere.⁷⁴ "This is exactly what the networks have got to do to survive in a marketplace that has so many other options today."⁷⁵ Even though the program cost an estimated \$325,000 to produce per episode—a budget comparable to a primetime network show—CBS executives felt the need to compete for their share of the children's market at a time when the big three networks were losing to syndicated programs with toy lines that absorbed "a sizable portion of the \$250 million or so in advertising that once went mostly to the networks."⁷⁶ Thus CBS was willing to take the risk on *Playhouse*, particularly since the show had the veneer of edge and a built-in audience following the success of Burton's film. As a Devo fan, Reubens thought the *E-Z* tapes were a good frame of reference for the sound he wanted for the television series.⁷⁷ Reubens tapped Mothersbaugh, who was initially apprehensive because he had not scored for television. But

⁷² T. Gertler, "The Pee-Wee Perplex," *Rolling Stone* 493 (1987): 37-40, 100, 102-103.

⁷³ John J. O'Connor, "Gentle Lunacy Rules 'Pee-Wee's Playhouse,'" *New York Times* 136 (1986): H27(N).

⁷⁴ Peter J. Boyer, "Pee-Wee Herman Readies 'Playhouse,'" *New York Times*, September 4, 1986. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/09/04/arts/pee-wee-herman-readies-playhouse.html>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Gertler, "The Pee-Wee Perplex"; Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

Mothersbaugh knew Reubens and Stephen R. Johnson, an animator and music video director then best known for his work with the Talking Heads who Reubens hired to direct the show's first season.⁷⁸ Mothersbaugh was also interested in the challenge, particularly because Reubens gave him vague directions and promised creative freedom.

The opening credits for *Playhouse* were tremendously important for establishing the program's storyworld and its inhabitants, which introduced Herman by name along with a series of anthropomorphic supporting characters like Chairry, Globey, Pterri the Pterodactyl, and the interspecies beatniks that comprised the Puppet Band. It was also the end result of a tremendous amount of coordinated labor. The vivid set showcased Gary Panter's heterogeneous bric-a-brac art direction. A cartoonist associated with the Los Angeles punk scene through his wife Nicole, who managed the Germs,⁷⁹ Panter made a name for himself after his work was published in *Rolling Stone* and the underground comic anthology *Raw*, which led to the *Playhouse* gig.⁸⁰ Panter believed that artists should work within a capitalist system rather than outside of it in order to effect meaningful cultural critique and systemic change. He articulated such ideas in "Rozz Tox Manifesto," an essay that indicted punk's contradictory position against "selling out" as anti-capitalist posturing that denied British and American bands' dependence upon major label support, claiming that "[b]y necessity we must infiltrate popular mediums. We are building a business-based art movement. This is not new. Admitting it is."⁸¹ Panter's espousal of such views was enormously influential to people associated with the Los Angeles punk community, including Groening, who struck up a friendship with Panter after reaching out to him with a fan

⁷⁸ "Music of the Playhouse," *Pee-Wee's Playhouse: The Complete Series* (Hollywood: Shout! Factory, 2014).

⁷⁹ Alice Bag, "Interview with: Nicole Panter," *Women in L.A. Punk Archives*, January 21, 2016. <http://alicebag.com/women-in-la-punk/2016/1/21/nicole-panter>.

⁸⁰ Chris Bors, "Gary Panter in New York," *Blouin Art Info*, May 9, 2008. <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/27542/gary-panter-in-new-york>.

⁸¹ Gary Panter, "The Rozz Tox Manifesto," 1980. <http://www.altx.com/manifestos/rozztox.html>.

letter.⁸² It also echoed Devo's justification for the Warner signing and their decision to relocate to Los Angeles in 1976, which put them in proximity with Panter and members of the scene. Finally, it anticipated *Playhouse*'s ethos, which Reubens saw as subversive by using corporate patronage to subsidize what he perceived to be an experimental variety show.⁸³

Yet despite the various connections *Playhouse* had with the L.A. punk scene, scoring for television was very different from collaborating as a band member. Mothersbaugh and his colleagues had to tailor their contributions to Reubens' vision and television production's financial and temporal realities. Theme and incidental music was a small fraction of that projected cost relative to the program's various above- and below-the-line expenses, like actors' salaries, set design and maintenance, costuming, and the program's integration of live-action performance with original animation. It also had to accommodate the program's aesthetics and narrative structure, prompting Mothersbaugh to comment that several musicians "tried to get into composing and it didn't work ... [T]he writers that have the most success are the ones that are empathetic. First of all, you have to understand what your job is, and it's to help the director's [or showrunner's] vision come to fruition," as opposed to being in a band where "[y]ou have your own vision and your own story to tell."⁸⁴ To honor Reubens' vision for a postmodern children's program, Mothersbaugh drew inspiration from lounge music and instrumental jazz he consumed during his coming of age and through the cartoons he watched as a child. He built the theme song from a riff from Martin Denny's "Quiet Village" and based much of its melody on

⁸² David Jacob Kramer, "Interview: Gary Panter," *The Believer* 7, no. 5 (June 2009): http://www.believermag.com/issues/200906/?read=interview_panter.

⁸³ Terry Gross, "Fresh Air: Pee-Wee Herman is a Loner, a Rebel—and Back," *NPR*, November 12, 2010. <http://www.npr.org/2010/11/11/131247235/pee-wee-herman-is-a-loner-a-rebel---and-back>; Michael Schulman, "Pee-Wee Redux," *New Yorker* 85, no. 45 (2010): 22-23; Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

⁸⁴ Kubernick, *Hollywood Shack Job*, 197.

“Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” while the end credit music swiped from *Lassie* and Cleveland-based syndicated children’s program *Barnaby and Friends*.⁸⁵

The theme’s vocals also directly referenced an important figure in film and early television animation. Upon Reubens’ instruction, singer Cyndi Lauper based her performance on coquettish flapper Betty Boop. However, Lauper’s participation suggested that producing a television theme song, especially one that requires the triangulation of several contributors, is rooted in conflict and compromise. She recorded under the name of her backup singer Ellen Shaw.⁸⁶ Lauper was coming off the success of her 1983 full-length debut, *She’s So Unusual*, which generated several hits on the back of its lead single, “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” and its gleefully prismatic music video. This resulted in a brief comeback for Lauper’s label, Portrait, a flailing subsidiary of Columbia-owned Epic Records. Lauper was in the process of recording *True Colors*, which she loaded with stately ballads in an effort to distance herself from her image as new wave’s Technicolor kook and showcase the vocal and songwriting talents she displayed on *Unusual*’s second single, “Time After Time.” Thus, despite her friendship with Reubens, who Lauper met as at the MTV’s New Year’s Ball in 1985 and who appeared as a telephone operator on *Colors*’ “911,” Lauper believed that providing the vocals for a children’s show theme song would hamper her professional reinvention. As Lauper explained in her memoir, “[i]n our superficial world, people couldn’t accept both at the same time. So I sang the theme song using the pseudonym ... And then Paul sent me back a tape that was so hilariously funny, of me singing the theme song with him in between saying ‘Oh no! My career is ruined, oh no!’”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee’s Playhouse*; Roberts, “Are You Not Devo? You Are Mutato”; “Music of the Playhouse.”

⁸⁶ Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee’s Playhouse*.

⁸⁷ Cyndi Lauper with Jancee Dunn, *Cyndi Lauper: A Memoir* (New York: Atria Books, 2012), 167.

But despite Panter's, Mothersbaugh's, and Lauper's shared participation in the production of *Playhouse*'s opening credits, their individual efforts were folded into different parts of the process. The sequence was shot in a SoHo loft that the production company Broadcast Arts rented to film the first season and took nearly seven weeks to complete. During this period, which immediately preceded the show's mid-September premiere, Mothersbaugh struggled to execute Reubens' directives for the theme song. As animator Phil Trumbo recalled, "[w]hen we got into Paul's dressing room, I put in my black-and-white animatic of [our] latest opening sequence motion test. Paul had a boombox and a VHS player. I told Mark to cue up his audio and Paul said, 'Yeah, these both look cool. Go ahead.' It was kind of like, hearing the music and seeing the picture together, it made sense to him."⁸⁸ Though the animation process was extensive for the opening credits, once the melody was established for the theme song, Reubens and co-lyricist George McGrath wrote words to Mothersbaugh's melody in less than a day. McGrath remembered that Reubens "wanted the person singing to sound like Betty Boop. He went on to sing the first line in a raspy voice with jazz hands and wiggling hips. He said ideally the lyrics would mention all the puppets."⁸⁹ McGrath returned a rough draft to Reubens the next morning that the star sang into a tape recorder for Mothersbaugh, who then used the demo as a guide track for the melody. Then, Reubens approached Lauper to sing the theme song, which was recorded at CBS's New York headquarters. While the singer accompanied Ellen Shaw to the recording session so that Lauper could coach her, the songwriters were ultimately unhappy with what they recorded and Reubens convinced Lauper to step in if Shaw was credited instead.⁹⁰ Lauper tried to preserve her career within a set of external pressures from her label to

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 64-65.

represent herself in a certain way that she internalized by choosing to differentiate herself from her "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" image to assure professional longevity for herself and at Portrait, which her *Playhouse* participation threatened to jeopardize. Lauper also tried to serve Reubens' vision for what he wanted for his show at the time as a friend. Thus, Lauper's decision to keep her name off of the theme song was an expression of compromise. It does suggest some autonomy in her ability to exercise her willingness to contribute to *Playhouse* own terms. But symbolically, her unwillingness to put her name to her work as a vocalist, even if she was exercising agency not to, was indicative of how the Lauper was limited in her ability to exercise agency as a voice and collaborator on a project that was otherwise largely oriented toward Reubens's personal tastes. Thus, his decision to mock Lauper, however affectionately, for not signing her work is indicative of the power he exercised over the production, of which she played a part but was not credited for her contributions.

Once the credit sequence was finished, Mothersbaugh summarized the practice of scoring to *Playhouse*'s compressed production cycle by succinctly claiming that "I would get a tape of the show on Monday, write the music on Tuesday, record it on Wednesday, and mail it on Thursday. And Saturday, we'd watch it on TV. The turnaround was fast. They were scrambling."⁹¹ The production also had to account for distance, as Mothersbaugh was based in Los Angeles while *Playhouse* shot in New York during the first season because CBS executives believed it would be more cost effective. However, Mothersbaugh found the crunch time and distance enormously freeing, particularly after the grind of being in a band for nearly a decade. He was burnt out by "singing the same songs every day."⁹² Prior to being dropped by Warner Bros., Devo had been stuck in a cycle of writing an album, making a video to support the lead

⁹¹ Raftery, "Pee-Wee Turns 20."

⁹² "Music of the Playhouse."

single, and touring for nearly six years. “[A]ll of a sudden [there] was this incredible world where I had to write a half-hour’s worth of music in a couple days. I had to write more than the side of an album, almost an album’s worth of music every week and you’d see it at the end of the week.”⁹³ Mothersbaugh had room to compose in different generic traditions, as well as experiment with samplers to punctuate his score with non-traditional sounds like belches and other noises that he would then spread across the keyboard and use as his instruments.⁹⁴ Yet he had much to learn during production on the show’s first season. He used a Fairlight, an audio sampler that ran on floppy discs and predated interface programs like MIDI that would allow keyboard players to store and synchronize multiple melodies at once, so he had to play and record each track individually before layering them. In addition, he was unfamiliar with SMPTE time code—an editing standard developed in the mid-1960s that affixed time stamps to individual frames of recorded visual media in order to lessen the burdens of sound and music synchronization—until an editor at Broadway Arts asked him why he did not use them.⁹⁵ “I had no one to advise me,” Mothersbaugh admitted. “I would just turn the tape on and I’d watch the picture and I’d have some musicians in a room, for each cue I’d go ‘1, 2, let’s go, boom’—and we’d play and we’d try to get the right tempo, we’d try to start at the right moment, but we’d be a few frames off and we’d have to do the whole thing over again.”⁹⁶

After the program’s first season, *Playhouse* became a tremendously desirable property for ancillary merchandising. Reubens had a three-picture deal with Paramount, which the star continued to honor with the theatrical release of *Big Top Pee-Wee*, a sequel to *Big Adventure*, in 1988. The studio also sought to associate the franchise with a variety of products, with

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Paramount's licensing director Christine Miller pursuing eighteen contracts with Matchbox Toys, View-master Ideal Group, and a number of other companies able to design and manufacture figurines, playhouses, leisure wear, and school supplies affixed with Herman's likeness.⁹⁷ Matchbox was an important industrial player during *Playhouse's* merchandising craze. The toy manufacturer debuted its line of talking Pee-Wee dolls during the 1987 winter holiday season and sold out of the original 100,000 that made it to market, prompting the swift manufacture of 250,000 additional figurines for 1988's first quarter. By June of that same year, Matchbox released a line of wind-up toys and figurines of *Playhouse's* cast of supporting characters and spent an estimated \$1 million on television advertising for the Pee-Wee doll. Such licensing decisions assume that *Playhouse's* target market were kids and, tacitly, parents who were willing to spend money on consumer goods to support their children's leisure activities. *Playhouse's* "popularity and uniqueness" was not perceived to favor consumers on the basis of gender,⁹⁸ though the emphasis on dartboards and baseball mitts suggested that Matchbox, CBS, and advertising firm Sawdon & Bess directly catered to an assumed boy consumer base and then used its sizeable girl following to retroactively spin its marketing strategy as gender neutral.

But the market for such merchandise extended beyond children. In April 1988, Nielsen reported that 30 percent of the 7.3 million people who watched *Playhouse* were adult viewers.⁹⁹ Admittedly, such figures were reported alongside concerns about slipping viewership among children. By the end of May ABC reported a ratings drop of 37 percent among viewers under six, which various network insiders attributed to inconsistent people-meter logging, expanded viewing options in cable and syndication, and channel surfing, prompting Lorimar executive

⁹⁷ Janie Steinberg, "Pee-Wee Looms Large in Licensing," *Advertising Age*, June 6, 1988, S-1, S-6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, S-1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, S-6.

Dick Robertson to proclaim, “children’s viewing habits are very flexible. They fall in love with the next pretty girl who walks down the street.”¹⁰⁰ Whether *Pee-Wee*’s returns stemmed in part from more diligent logging from parents and other adult viewers, businessmen seized upon the opportunity these numbers promised to provide. C.A. Reed Inc. product manager Steve Getz positioned its line of Pee-Wee party supplies “toward the juvenile market, but since we’ve had them out, a lot of my friends have called and asked where they can get them,” while Matchbox marketing executive Jim Walsh recalled that “[d]uring the Thanksgiving-to-Christmas period, because of the short supply, we were receiving an average of 100 calls a day, and CBS [was receiving] hundreds of phone calls, many of them from adults saying they wanted to buy the Pee-Wee doll for their wives, their girlfriends, even their grandmothers.”¹⁰¹

Getz’s and Walsh’s perceptions about the marketability of *Playhouse*’s paratexts also illuminate how the program endeared itself to adult consumers—primarily a loose assemblage of parents, college students, and hip urban professionals—and raised questions about gifting’s gendered interpersonal dynamics and the extent to which adult women constituted a substantial portion of *Playhouse*’s audience. However, one area where *Playhouse* had little visibility in the ancillary market was with its soundtrack. Though *Advertising Age* contributor Janie Steinberg reported that Warner Bros. planned to release a compilation of *Playhouse* music in 1988, no such album ever materialized. This may seem a surprising omission, given *Playhouse*’s associations with various popular musicians and symbiotic relationship with MTV during the mid- to late-1980s. The series was repackaged several times. In an effort to cash in on the home video market, a handful of episodes were first released on tape and Laserdisc by Hi-Tops in the late

¹⁰⁰ Aljean Harmetz, “Networks Face a Drop in Viewing By Children,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1988, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/25/arts/networks-face-a-drop-in-viewing-by-children.html>.

¹⁰¹ Janie Steinberg, “Pee-Wee Looms Large in Licensing,” *Ibid.*, S-1, S-6.

80s, a prescient gesture to a hungry but as-yet underserved TV home viewing market, with MGM/UA Home Entertainment producing a more comprehensive video collection in 1996. However, the complete series was unavailable until Image Entertainment released a DVD box set as part of an agreement with CBS and Paramount in 2004.¹⁰² It was remastered on Blu-ray in 2014 by Shout! Factory, a Los Angeles-based music and home video company specializing in reissues through licensing deals with several film studios and television production companies.¹⁰³ The show's music remained intact because the cues were either original compositions that were technically owned by Paramount and CBS or were song from the public domain.

However, Mothersbaugh surmises that the lack of a soundtrack stemmed from record labels' unwillingness to develop and market scores due to their limited commercial viability. "Labels don't really care about composers," he would later claim before adding that "[m]ost movies do not care about the underscore because, from a numbers point of view, it's a rare soundtrack that sells numbers that are exciting."¹⁰⁴ Though Mothersbaugh was specifically reflecting upon his experience in the film industry, such observations coincide with the marketing of music associated with the *Playhouse* franchise. *Playhouse* relied extensively on musicians' labor. However, Mothersbaugh's primary contribution for the program was instrumental underscore. Though it supplemented the program's televisuality and gave a coherent framework within which to organize a variety of disparate elements that comprised its episodic narrative, save for Lauper's participation in the theme song *Playhouse's* score did not

¹⁰² Thomas K. Arnold, "Back to 'Pee-Wee's Playhouse,'" *USA Today*, November 9, 2005, D5; Tara Goe, "Good Pervert, Bad Pervert," *Kitchen Sink* 3, no. 1 (2004): 10, 38-40; Tasha Robinson, "Paul Reubens," *The A.V. Club*, July 26, 2006. <http://www.avclub.com/article/paul-reubens-14004>.

¹⁰³ Mike Barnes, "Shout! Factory Nabs 'Pee-Wee's Playhouse' Distribution Rights," *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 18, 2013. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/shout-factory-pee-wee-playhouse-588490>; Keith Phipps, "The Childish Genius of Pee-Wee's Playhouse," *The Daily Beast*, October 23, 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/23/the-childish-genius-of-pee-wee-s-playhouse.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Kubernick, *Hollywood Shack Job*, 195.

often prominently feature vocals. This presented record label and network executives with a challenge when faced with the prospect of selling *Playhouse*'s music, as the voice is often the most commercially identifiable and exploitable element of pop composition and production. Singers often function as delivery systems for relatable lyrical sentiments and instantly memorable melodies in a pop song's organizational schema, which instrumental music can challenge. And even though the program's theme song showcased one of the era's more indelible voices, it purposely buried her labor through misattribution. Finally, *Playhouse* may have neglected the soundtrack market because it assumed that its target audience was too young. Despite its sizable adult (and female) following CBS marketed *Playhouse* as a kids' show. Thus, executives may not have perceived a soundtrack as a valuable commodity despite the show's substantial adult following and the possibility that a cross-section also bought Devo records.

Furthermore, *Playhouse* had an extensive, unruly soundtrack that was difficult to compile. Mothersbaugh claimed to write an album's worth of material per episode.¹⁰⁵ Unlike traditional film and television scores, Mothersbaugh did not use leitmotifs. Apart from the theme song, the closing credits sequence, and accompaniment for interstitial segments like the "Penny" and "El Hombre" cartoons, few songs repeated between episodes. As a result, *Playhouse* episodes often had short standalone cues, some no more than five seconds in length. This also spoke to Mothersbaugh's inexperience. "I had never scored anything before and I was about to start doing this thing where I'd start the videotape and then start my audiotape and then we'd start running and when it got time to jump on the train, we'd start the cue and write it."¹⁰⁶ When Reubens told him, "when something's really exciting, make it overly exciting. When it's really

¹⁰⁵ "Music of the Playhouse."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

scary, make it really really scary. And when it's make it sad make it really sad,"¹⁰⁷ the composer thought he should score onscreen action instead of establish various themes to assign to specific characters and recycle and modify. Mothersbaugh was essentially Mickey Mousing, a scoring technique of matching picture to sound that originated with early sound productions like Disney's *Steamboat Willy*.¹⁰⁸ By accident, Mothersbaugh departed from the governing logics of compilation soundtracks that relied on collections of songs that were anchored to character and story but were long and memorable enough to exist independent from its source material.

It was also tremendously exhausting work for Mothersbaugh to produce a different score for each installment of the program's 13-episode first season. To lessen the composer's fatigue, Todd Rundgren was brought in to score the eleventh episode and the season finale while Elfman scored three episodes from the back half of the first season and two during the first half of the second season as a show of gratitude toward Reubens.¹⁰⁹ For season two, Mothersbaugh negotiated alternating episodes with guest composers.¹¹⁰ This freed Reubens up to solicit other musicians he liked to contribute music, which he was better able to do once the production relocated from Broadway to the Hollywood Center Studios in Los Angeles where many of his favorite artists were based.¹¹¹ As a result, male recording artists like art collective the Residents, funk pioneer George Clinton, producer Van Dyke Parks, Dweezil Zappa, and burgeoning film composer Cliff Martinez scored various episodes during the series' subsequent seasons. By that point, Mothersbaugh had established the show's tone with an experimental, synth-based score with touches of exotica and novelty records from his childhood that were shot through with

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Goldmark, *Funny Pictures: Animation and Comedy in Studio-Era Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ "Music of the Playhouse."

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

Mothersbaugh's more angular, percussive approach to the synthesizer as a member of Devo. Elfman claimed to enjoy the experience, which he perceived as an opportunity to retreat from the complexities of orchestral film scoring by only using "a keyboard and some samplers" and "banging on some things and having fun and knowing that there was really no sense of it needing to take itself seriously or needing to sound really professional. I recorded it all by myself at home and sent tapes in and it was just done. I didn't even have a studio."¹¹² However, even with an abbreviated third season due to the 1988 WGA strike, there were entirely too many fragmentary pieces from Mothersbaugh and the show's rotating troupe of guest composers to repackage.

Instrumental music's supposed lack of commercial viability also extended to the uneven production and distribution decisions surrounding the franchise's film soundtracks. Warner Bros. did not do a standalone release for Elfman's score to *Big Adventure* and instead compiled it with his score for Orion's 1986 Rodney Dangerfield vehicle *Back to School*. The film's compilation soundtrack, which featured Oingo Boingo's 1985 hit "Dead Man's Party," was released separately on MCA. The same label was also behind the release of *Big Top Pee-Wee's* compilation soundtrack, though Elfman's score was never released commercially. However, though Elfman's composition work for the *Pee-Wee* films did not enjoy uniform or sustained interest in the market as promotional paratexts, his contributions did generate considerable professional attention that he leveraged into a second career. After its release in 1986, cues from *Big Adventure/Back to School* were used as temp tracks for dailies and rough cuts on several productions.¹¹³ This increased his demand, as he was perceived as the man best able to craft the "Danny Elfman sound." One solicitor was Matt Groening, a cartoonist with a deal at Fox to develop a sitcom based on his animated segments about a bug-eyed dysfunctional family for *The*

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Kendall, "From *Pee-Wee* to *Batman* to Two Film a Year."

Tracey Ullman Show. *The Simpsons*' relationship to score, cult programming, and merchandising helps illuminate the music and television industries' perception of musicians' commercial viability for broadcast network programming and its ancillary markets at the end of the 1980s.

The Jetsons Meets The Flintstones

Roughly five years before Devo moved to Los Angeles, Danny Elfman's older brother Richard formed a band that he originally called the Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo while the younger Elfman brother taught himself how to play the guitar he received for his sixteenth birthday.¹¹⁴ The L.A.-native Elfman brothers got into theatrical director Jérôme Savary's avant-jazz outfit Le Grand Magic Circus and performed across Ghana and Mali, a gig that Danny dropped out of high school to pursue.¹¹⁵ After their tour, the Elfmans used the experience to develop their own musical style, which drew upon film score composer Nino Rota, French cabaret, and Balinese gamelan music and much like Devo cannily deployed multimedia stage presentations to build their mythology. "Early on, the Mystic Knights were more of a visual thing than a musical one," Elfman recalled. "We had costume changes and animation."¹¹⁶

The band did not receive label representation until 1979 when upstart I.R.S. Records agreed to put out Oingo Boingo's self-released *Demo* EP, aided by a distribution deal with A&M. But Elfman straddled multiple industries. By the mid-1970s he started working as an actor and nurturing a long-time interest in composition. Before Elfman picked up a guitar, he saw Robert Wise's 1951 science fiction classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. While seated in the Baldwin Hills Theater, the pre-teen Elfman heard Bernard Herrmann's score for the first

¹¹⁴ Kory Grow, "Inside Danny Elfman's Twisted Cult Film 'Forbidden Zone,'" *Rolling Stone*, November 6, 2015. <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/inside-danny-elfmans-twisted-cult-film-forbidden-zone-20151106>.

¹¹⁵ Grow, "Inside Danny Elfman's Twisted Cult Film 'Forbidden Zone';" David Sprague, "Mystic Knighthood," *Variety* 292, no. 51 (2006): A2, A8.

¹¹⁶ Sprague, "Mystic Knighthood," A2.

time. “I never heard anything quite like it,” Elfman marveled.¹¹⁷ “The use of the brassy orchestra mixed with the organs and the Theremin were, to my ears, extremely powerful, but at the same time thoughtful, inspiring and evocative. Then, later in the score, the use of the ostinato piano was so fresh-sounding to me.”¹¹⁸ His brother gave Elfman an opportunity to apply those interests by inviting him to create music for his directorial debut, *Forbidden Zone*. The black-and-white musical was an adaptation of Oingo Boingo’s stage act and focused on a group of Los Angeles’ denizens who find a portal to the Sixth Dimension and encounter Satan (played by Elfman).¹¹⁹

Forbidden Zone was a transitional moment for Oingo Boingo. It allowed the older brother to pursue filmmaking and let the younger brother take over the band. This resulted in a noticeable shift in Oingo Boingo’s sound that reflected Elfman’s interest in second-wave ska, despite initial consternation from its ardent fan base. One vocal opponent was apparently Matt Groening, a young cartoonist and critic for alt-weekly *The LA Reader*. Elfman recalled him “g[iving] us a nasty review and I wrote a nasty rebuttal, because he admitted he only showed up for encores, drunk.”¹²⁰ However, after responding to Groening’s concert review, Elfman became a fan of the critic’s comic strip *Life in Hell*, a mordant take on Los Angeles filtered through the experiences of a paranoid one-eared rabbit and his surrealist misadventures with his illegitimate son and his gay neighbors. While attending Evergreen College, Groening created a comics page for the *Cooper Point Journal* to showcase the work that he and his friend Lynda Barry produced. After graduating in 1977, Groening accompanied girlfriend Lynda Weinman to Los Angeles. He told *Playboy*, “I got here on a Friday night in August; it was about a hundred and two degrees;

¹¹⁷ Danny Elfman, “The Day the Earth Stood Still,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 409, no. 29 (2009): 20.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Forbidden Zone*. Hollywood: Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1980.

¹²⁰ Tim Appelo, “Danny Elfman: My Constant Worry Is That I’ll Run Out Of Ideas,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 418, no. 38 (2012): 79.

my car broke down in the fast lane of the Hollywood Freeway while I was listening to a drunken deejay who was giving his last program on a local rock station . . . And then I had a series of lousy jobs.”¹²¹ He was a clerk at Licorice Pizza, a record store and dispensary across from the Whisky a Go-Go, where he sold photocopies of *Hell* for two dollars that he displayed alongside the store’s inventory of punk zines. *Hell* developed a cult following from the shop’s patrons, whose shoplifting habits gave it a subterranean cache.¹²² A year later, Leonard Koren published it in his alternative periodical, *Wet*. Groening leveraged this into freelance work with the *Reader* after cold-calling managing editor James Vowell. Within six months, he was the assistant editor.

Groening also relied upon the professional support of two women who worked at the *Reader* and would later be important in his personal life. First was Jane Levine, the newspaper’s publisher as well as the cartoonist’s girlfriend, who encouraged Groening to devote his energies toward producing *Hell* over his pursuit of rock criticism, though he would occasionally write reviews until he left the *Reader* in 1986 to work on *The Tracey Ullman Show*.¹²³ Levine would also mentor Deborah Caplan, a sales representative at the *Reader*, who supervised the strip’s syndication deal and subsequent merchandising, initiatives she oversaw long after she married Groening in 1986. Levine claimed that “Deborah was really the one who got other papers to run *Life in Hell* and started making calendars and greeting cards and all that sort of stuff . . . I’m not sure he would have ever made himself the popular success he was without Deborah.”¹²⁴

To launch the strip, Caplan created a company for it called Acme Syndicated Features—a nod to the pervasive faceless conglomerate seen in old Warner Bros. cartoons—and developed a

¹²¹ Neil Tesser, “20 Questions with Matt Groening,” *Playboy* 37, no. 7 (1990): 130.

¹²² Jenny Eliscu, “Homer and Me: Matt Groening, Bart’s Real Dad, On Why ‘The Simpsons’ Still Rock—and Fire Guns,” *Rolling Stone* 910 (2002): 50-51, 54, 56-58.

¹²³ John Ortved, *The Simpsons: An Uncensored, Unauthorized History* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

publicity package that she sold to vendors at the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies convention.¹²⁵ Caplan also created a product line for the strip and negotiated free advertising for the merchandise in order to stretch the \$15 Groening received per publication for each strip, as well as created a mail order service for fans to buy *Life in Hell*-branded mugs, t-shirts, and greeting cards. She enlisted underground comics promoter George DiCaprio as *Hell*'s distributor, which resulted in Pantheon publishing a coffee table book of the strip. Finally, Caplan harnessed various retail tie-ins for *Hell* by getting its merchandise placed at downtown boutiques like Soap Plant and Oz and organizing book-signing events in collaboration with L.A. Eyeworks. In 1986, the year Caplan married Groening, *Hell* was syndicated in its 200th paper, *The Village Voice*, which considerably widened its fanbase. One reader was director-screenwriter James L. Brooks, who began following the strip through a recommendation from his production designer, Polly Platt.¹²⁶ Brooks had a development deal with Fox and was in the process of creating a variety program for British actress Tracey Ullman. He met with Fox's chairman and CEO, Barry Diller, with whom he had previously worked on *Taxi* and *Terms of Endearment* during Diller's tenure at Paramount and suggested that Groening produce a series of bumpers that would run between Ullman's skits, a recommendation that eventually edged *National Lampoon*'s Mary "M.K." Brown out of the job.¹²⁷ Caplan's branding savvy proved itself useful when the animated segments detailing the Simpson family's various dysfunctions ended up eclipsing *The Tracey Ullman Show*. In order to build on momentum and increase the initial ratings success the network generated from airing first-run programming against network reruns during the 1988 WGA strike as a non-union broadcaster, Fox gave Groening a development deal to create a spinoff.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 48-49.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Groening rationalized that his partnership with Fox was “an experiment where I could go as an underground cartoonist into the mainstream.”¹²⁹ Rock music was always an important component to Groening’s perception of *The Simpsons* as both a network product and an expression of subcultural identification. Early on, the program featured prominent cameos from Spinal Tap, the ersatz British metal band of Rob Reiner’s eponymous 1984 mockumentary, and the Ramones. Both choices were met with derision from Fox executives, who lobbied for more popular guests. This was a source of pride for Groening, who enthused about the Ramones’ snotty rendition of “Happy Birthday to You” to Reagan-esque nuclear power plant owner Mr. Burns in one episode because “their music didn’t sound like it could be the soundtrack for a Chevrolet commercial, like everyone else does. I also loved that Fox was so pissed off by it.”¹³⁰

Similar impulses motivated Groening’s original choice for the show’s composer, who was to write theme music for the show’s opening credit sequence that depicted the titular family rushing home from school, the afternoon commute, and domestic errands to watch television together on the couch. Groening pitched John Zorn, a New York-based avant-jazz saxophonist, “but then I played some of his stuff for everybody on the staff and they couldn’t handle it.”¹³¹ Groening then cued up a piece by Juan García Esquivel, who was roundly dismissed. Groening finally offered up his third choice, Elfman, who the staff approved. Despite his digs at Elfman’s band in print, Groening professed to be a huge Oingo Boingo fan and was particularly taken with Elfman’s *Big Adventure* score. “I detected influences of [*Godfather* composer] Nino Rota, and I liked the quirky whimsy,” Groening recalled.¹³² In particular, Groening was struck by Elfman’s ability to balance Romanticism with pastiches to television theme songs from their youth.

¹²⁹ Eliscu, “Homer and Me,” 56.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Eliscu, “Homer and Me,” 56.

¹³² David Mermelstein, “TV’s Frenetic Grandeur,” *Variety* 292, no. 51 (2006): A4.

Elfman's *Big Adventure* score lifted from Vic Mizzy's work for *The Addams Family* and *Green Acres* and Hoyt Curtin's work for Hanna-Barbera's *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones*.¹³³ Elfman's intertextual references to *The Flintstones* were particularly significant, as *The Simpsons*' team used the show as a template for their animated franchise. Such compositional decisions also reinforced how those reference points were shared across *Playhouse* and *The Simpsons*, as both animated productions' thematic investment with post-modernism and retro futurism were influences shared between Elfman and Mothersbaugh as musicians and composers.

Yet Elfman knew that the job would be challenging for him as a composer. "You have to make your statement fast [on television]. There are no seconds to spare. You've got to kick into it and close. Everything is heightened."¹³⁴ However, one dominant trope in television theme music that *The Simpsons* shared with *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* was the voiced invocation of the protagonist's name, a practice that literalizes Justin London's definition of a leitmotif as "a proper name in language."¹³⁵ For ensemble-driven genres like the family sitcom, characters usually congregate around the father's last name. Theme songs follow suit, with composers either using the family name as the basis for lyrics or crafting an instrumental passage to wrap around its incantation to the patriarch. Elfman also nodded to Groening's Esquivel fandom by using vocal glissandi for the theme's recitation of "the Simpsons" as a definitive element in the composer's music. After meeting with Groening, Elfman surmised that "*The Simpsons* theme should sound right out of 1965."¹³⁶ The composer aimed for something that would put *The Simpsons* in dialogue with other network cartoon shows from his childhood and stumbled on a melody described by a member of the animation team as "sort of a mix of *The Jetsons* and *The*

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ London, "Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score," 89.

¹³⁶ Tim Appelo, "My Constant Worry Is That I'll Run Out Of Ideas."

Flintstones.”¹³⁷ The tune came to Elfman on the drive home from the meeting, prompting him to pull over and write it down immediately. Once he got home, Elfman “recorded a demo in ten minutes and sent it to [Groening] the same day. [It was] the most direct thing I’ve ever done.”¹³⁸

However, even though Elfman was commissioned well into the first season’s production, it still took a while to integrate it into the show. The pilot did not include title credits, which were produced after Fox picked up the series. In addition, it took about six weeks to produce an episode due to animation costs and labor. This involved intense coordination between *The Simpsons*’ animation house Klasky Csupo, which produced all of the *Ullman* sketches in-house but oversaw character design, layout, and storyboarding for the series and outsourced the rest of the work to AKOM, a South Korean animation studio, to keep up with the demands of producing a primetime sitcom. There was extensive miscommunication between Csupo, AKOM, and Gracie Films, resulting in a shelved second episode that aired as the first season finale.¹³⁹ The original credit sequence was produced separately from the individual episodes, but still required coordination between these three entities. Thus the first season was well into production when Elfman came in to conduct the session recording for the show’s theme, which took place on the Fox lot in one of the few remaining recording stages in Hollywood. “[A]n eighty-piece orchestra came in and the choir was there,” recalled postproduction coordinator Brian Roberts, who sat in on the session. “It was our first look at the opening title of the show. We’d never seen it before and of course we’d never heard Danny’s score.”¹⁴⁰ Amid *The Simpsons*’ chaotic first season Elfman contributed a melody that defined his career and still earns roughly \$11.50 per airing.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ortved, *The Simpsons*, 80.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Harvey Deneroff, “Matt Groening’s Baby Turns 10,” *Animation Magazine* 14, no. 1 (2000): 10, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Ortved, *The Simpsons*, 79-80.

¹⁴¹ Jim Fusilli, “Music: Scoring ‘The Simpsons,’” *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2012, D.5; John M. Glionna, “A Different Beat,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1999. <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/apr/18/magazine/tm-28420>.

“I’ve slaved over movies 16 to 18 hours a day for three months, only to have them disappear over a weekend, yet this thing I wrote in a day will probably be inscribed on my tombstone.”¹⁴²

But Elfman only contributed the theme; he was not *The Simpsons*’ house composer.

Integral to the theme’s ubiquity and endurance was Fox’s and Groening’s zeal toward pursuing several merchandising ventures for the program, including its music. Yet its legacy as a piece of music would not be established until after its first season. This was due, in part, to the production not hiring a full-time composer until after Alf Clausen was brought in to audition by scoring the second season’s third episode, which was also the first installment of *The Simpsons*’ long-running Halloween-themed “Treehouse of Horror” series.¹⁴³ Thus, the first season has almost no score to it beyond Elfman’s theme, a slightly modified version of it for the end credits, and a few character-based musical performances and in-universe commercial jingles and radio promos primarily written by staff writer Jeff Martin.¹⁴⁴ But despite *The Simpsons*’ initial lack of score there was interest in realizing the show’s commercial appeal in a variety of markets, including music. These ventures were especially lucrative for Groening, who benefitted from witnessing Caplan’s entrepreneurship for *Life in Hell*. Fox executives agreed to give the creator a substantial share of the show’s merchandising in exchange for lower pay on the assumption that there was little money to be found in licensing for a primetime network sitcom.¹⁴⁵ A month after the first season finale, *Marketing News* reported that an estimated total of 70 licensees had acquired rights to create branded products using the characters’ likeness for official merchandise and up to 200 more requests from various vendors and third parties.¹⁴⁶ Two particularly high-

¹⁴² Mermelstein, “TV’s Frenetic Grandeur.”

¹⁴³ Will Harris, “A Chat with Alf Clausen,” *Bullz-Eye*, September 26, 2007. http://www.bullzeye.com/television/interviews/2007/alf_clausen.htm.

¹⁴⁴ Ortved, *The Simpsons*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Cyndee Miller, “Hey Dudes: Fox TV May Have a Cash Cow in Its Licensing Deals,” *Marketing News* 24, no. 12 (1990): 1.

profile licensees were Mattel and Nestle. Mattel entered into a licensing agreement with 20th Century Fox in the spring of 1990 to develop a line of action figures and accessories for the show that would debut in toy stores and retail chains like Penney's and Spencer Gifts by the following fall.¹⁴⁷ Nestle aligned its Butterfinger candy bar with Bart Simpson, who popularized the tag "nobody better lay a finger on my Butterfinger" in a campaign that began airing in March.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, *The Simpsons'* hooligan eldest son was both the first season's breakout star and a hot commodity. In addition to toys and candy, Bart's likeness and catchphrase "don't have a cow, man" were emblazoned on key chains, school supplies, coffee mugs, toothbrushes, and t-shirts. Perhaps as a nod to Bart's delinquency, the character also appeared on unlicensed (and promptly seized) merchandise. Some representations of Bart's "bad boy" were blatantly sexist, such as the unauthorized t-shirts that depicted the ten-year-old boy's post-coital engagement with a naked adult woman.¹⁴⁹ Others were a bit more radical in their attempt to laud Bart's representational and political weight. Most notable was "Black Bart," a racially marked version of the character.¹⁵⁰ But Bart's rebellious attitude would also be an integral part of *The Simpsons'* foray into pop music during its second season. In the spring of 1990, label impresario David Geffen approached Fox with the idea of releasing a compilation album during the winter holiday season.¹⁵¹ The show's lack of music presented an opportunity to showcase Bart (along with the vocal talents of actress Nancy Cartwright) on two new songs, "Do the Bartman" and "Deep, Deep Trouble." The first single was co-written by Bryan Loren and an uncredited Michael Jackson, who would later appear as "John Jay Smith" in a season three episode. According to

¹⁴⁷ Christy Fisher and Marcy Magiera, "Hey, Dude—Fox's Simpson Family is Hot," *Advertising Age* 61, no. 12 (1990): 4; Stuart Silverstein, "Mattel Stock Rises; Cartoon Deal Unveiled," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1990, D7.

¹⁴⁸ Fisher and Magiera, "Hey, Dude—Fox's Simpson Family is Hot."

¹⁴⁹ N.R. Kleinfield, "Cashing in a Hot New Brand Name," *New York Times*, April 29, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/29/business/cashing-in-on-a-hot-new-brand-name.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁵⁰ Michel Marriott, "I'm Black Bart and What About It?" *New York Times* 140 (1990): C1, C8.

¹⁵¹ Ortved, *The Simpsons*.

future showrunner Al Jean, Jackson proclaimed that “I want to write a number one hit for *The Simpsons*,” despite a conflict between Geffen and his label Epic that prevented him from being listed as a co-writer.¹⁵² Groening shared songwriting credit on the rap song “Deep, Deep Trouble,” Bart’s ode to juvenile delinquency, with DJ Jazzy Jeff.

The lead single, “Do the Bartman” was released on November 26, with the label’s marketing head overseeing the distribution of six different versions of the single to radio stations so that it could be played in multiple formats, along with a flipbook of Bart demonstrating how to do the dance.¹⁵³ In addition, the video’s production was outsourced to a Hungarian animation studio and premiered on Fox immediately after the episode “Bart the Daredevil” aired.¹⁵⁴ As *Billboard* contributors Chris Morris, Melinda Newman, and Ed Christman reported, the video’s Fox premiere “drew a 16.1 rating at a 25% share of viewers watching commercial TV that evening.”¹⁵⁵ In addition MTV, which Geffen gave an exclusive, aired the music video half an hour after the Fox broadcast and an MTV News feature on the making of *The Simpsons Sing the Blues*. This followed a week-long promotional build-up and preceded the video’s immediate heavy rotation on the channel.¹⁵⁶ All that buzz resulted in the album debuting at number 42 on *Billboard*’s Top Pop Charts and climbing up to number seven two weeks after Christmas.¹⁵⁷ Such returns were, of course, carefully marketed by Geffen. In addition to relying upon the video’s heavy saturation on MTV, which label representatives believed would give them access to teen and young adult viewers, Geffen attempted to exploit youthfulness as a strategy by

¹⁵² Phil Gallo, “Songs in the Key of ‘D’Oh!,” *Billboard* 126 (30): 24; Nancy Cartwright, *My Life as a 10-Year-Old Boy* (New York: Hyperion, 2000).

¹⁵³ Chris Morris, Melinda Newman, and Ed Christman, “Simpsons’ TV Power has Everyone Doing the ‘Bartman,’” *Billboard* 103, no. 2 (1991): 4-5.

¹⁵⁴ Deborah Hastings, “‘The Simpsons’ Sing the Blues,” *Deseret News* 141, no. 106 (1990): 18.

¹⁵⁵ Morris, Newman, and Christman. “Simpsons’ TV Power has Everyone Doing the ‘Bartman,’” 5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

lowering the compilation's retail value. The cassette of *The Simpsons Sing the Blues* cost \$7.99—a lower figure than the \$10.98 price point affixed to albums from Madonna, New Kids on the Block, and George Michael at the time¹⁵⁸—in an effort to seem inexpensive enough for parents' shopping lists and even affordable enough for kids to buy with allowance money. “If there was one record that a mall store would want to be merchandising at Christmas, it was *The Simpsons*” Geffen marketing head Robert Smith proclaimed after the label spent weeks installing window displays in malls for adolescent fans and placing newspaper circulars for their parents.¹⁵⁹

Despite its youth-oriented marketing strategy, “Do the Bartman” and “Deep, Deep Trouble” were filler for a *Simpsons* standards record. This may have appealed to some young listeners familiar with the Great American Songbook, but it seemed to more openly court the program's adult viewers who would recognize that cast members were covering blues guitarist Albert King's “Born Under a Bad Sign” and jazz chanteuse Billie Holiday's “God Bless the Child” in character.¹⁶⁰ The album also enlisted Geffen-affiliated artists as collaborators, lending name recognition to the proceedings even if the talent on offer was probably more recognizable to the target audience's parents.¹⁶¹ Ironic lounge singer Buster Poindexter backed Bart's cover of Chuck Berry's “School Day.” Jazz pianist Dr. John accompanied Homer and Marge on their duet of singer-songwriter Randy Newman's “I Love to See You Smile.” Homer's rendition of “Born Under a Bad Sign” featured B.B. King and the horn section from Bay Area funk band Tower of Power. Finally, “Moanin' Lisa Simpson,” the only other original song, featured Eagles guitarist Joe Walsh and Lovin' Spoonful frontman John Sebastian on harmonica. While the rationale for including these artists on a record marketed to young listeners is unclear, it makes more sense

¹⁵⁸ Ed Christman and Trudi Miller, “All Wound Up About Cassette Prices,” *Billboard* 102, no. 49 (1990): 6.

¹⁵⁹ Morris, Newman, and Christman. “Simpsons' TV Power has Everyone Doing the ‘Bartman,’” 5.

¹⁶⁰ Marcy Magiera, “Simpsons Got Blues,” *Advertising Age* 61, no. 49 (1990): 8.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

when understood alongside Geffen's acquisition by MCA in 1990 and David Geffen's pre-existing relationship with Walsh through the Eagles, who were signed to Geffen's previous label, Asylum Records. As a result, Geffen had access to Poindexter, King, and Dr. John and funneled their labor into a seemingly fail-safe tie-in for the Fox phenomenon.¹⁶²

The Simpsons Sing the Blues was released in December 1990. By that point in the series, Clausen had been installed as the show's composer. Clausen, a trained jazz musician and a television veteran, cut his teeth in jingle writing before steadily building his resume by working as a copyist, music director, and composer on shows like *The Partridge Family*, *Fame*, and *Moonlighting*, for which he netted his first Emmy nomination.¹⁶³ Clausen was wrapping up his four-year stint as the composer for NBC's science fiction sitcom *ALF* when he heard that *The Simpsons* was going into production.¹⁶⁴ He offered to write the theme song before learning that Groening enlisted Elfman, but initially declined Groening's offer to score the series. "I wanted to be a dramatic composer, and animation is too hard" Clausen explained, a pressure Groening appeased by telling the composer that despite the coordinated labor required to integrate score into animated programming, "[w]e don't look upon our show as being a cartoon. It's a drama in which the characters are drawn."¹⁶⁵ This convinced Clausen, who "auditioned" for the show by writing music for season two's "Treehouse of Horror" episode before he was offered the job.

Though Clausen established himself as an integral part of *The Simpsons*' team, he did so by elaborating upon Elfman's work. For example, the end credits to "Treehouse" featured a "spooky" version of the theme played on a tinny electric organ and punctuated with Theremin

¹⁶² Tom King, *The Operator: David Geffen Builds, Buys, and Sells the New Hollywood* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).

¹⁶³ Fusilli, "Scoring 'The Simpsons.'"

¹⁶⁴ Doug Adams, "The Simpsons' Secret Weapon: Alf Clausen," *Film Score Monthly* 2, no. 2 (1997): 24.

¹⁶⁵ Fusilli, "Scoring 'The Simpsons.'"

sounds to approximate wailing ghosts.¹⁶⁶ This later inspired Clausen to rearrange the end credits as a nod to the show's intertextuality. Season six's "The Springfield Connection," which focuses on Marge's police training to the buffoonish consternation of her husband, concludes with a reinterpretation of the theme song in the style of Mark Post's jazzy, lilting theme for NBC procedural *Hill Street Blues*.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, season five's "Homer the Vigilante" pays homage to the 1963 crime caper *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World* by liberally quoting its theme song.¹⁶⁸

Clausen also re-arranged the original theme twice during the second and third seasons, which in turn affected the opening credit sequence. Elfman's original composition was a simple twelve-note motif that briskly repeated, with slight modifications to tempo and scale, as each family member was introduced.¹⁶⁹ Clausen's version took advantage of the modularity built into Elfman's theme by treating each character's introduction as a standalone segment that could be shortened or extended. This often showcased Bart or Lisa. Their exodus from the drudgery of public school could be made more elaborate depending on what ridiculous proclamation Bart was forced to write on the chalkboard as punishment for his disruptive behavior during detention and what virtuosic saxophone solo Lisa improvised as she strolled out of band practice. Clausen's adaptation of Elfman's theme also transformed "the couch gag." This recurring segment concluded the opening credits and utilized various stunts and sight gags to comedic effect as the Simpsons tried to re-convene in the living room. The gag's duration often coincided with an episode's run time; if it was under, the couch gag became increasingly elaborate and relied upon Clausen's labor to stretch out the sequence. This resulted in embellishments like the

¹⁶⁶ "Treehouse of Horror," *The Simpsons*, Season 2, Episode 3, October 25, 1990.

¹⁶⁷ "The Springfield Connection," *The Simpsons*, Season 6, Episode 23, May 7, 1995.

¹⁶⁸ "Homer the Vigilante," *The Simpsons*, Season 5, Episode 11, January 6, 1994.

¹⁶⁹ Martin Kutnowski, "Trope and Irony in *The Simpsons*' Overture," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 5 (2008): 599-616.

“circus” gag, which first appeared in season four’s “Lisa’s First Word.”¹⁷⁰ The thirty-second joke involved the family getting pulled into a chorus line of showgirls and elephants, with Clausen and his orchestra sweetening the theme with brass instruments and bike horns.

As a result of Clausen’s participation, *The Simpsons*’ score became increasingly labor-intensive. In an interview with *NPR* host Liane Hansen, Clausen noted that the turnaround time for composing all of an episode’s background music is “usually exactly one week. I’ll look at the episode on Friday. I’ll score the episode the following Friday having composed about 30 to 35 cues in that short amount of time. We’ll mix the show on the following Monday and Tuesday and it goes on the air on Sunday.”¹⁷¹ Clausen’s musical training and stable presence on the show allowed the writers to explore a wide range of genres, including country and barbershop quartet to reflect Homer’s various thwarted forays into the music industries over the course of the series.¹⁷² Though music always reflected Groening’s personal taste and then carried over to characters like Lisa finding solace in the saxophone, it increasingly absorbed the musical’s narrative tropes—elaborate set pieces, rousing company numbers, and sung monologues detailing individual characters’ points of view—in its storytelling. This often required Clausen to write up to 35 original pieces of music per week.¹⁷³ This began with season four’s “A Streetcar Named Marge,” a retelling of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* that paralleled Stanley Kowalski’s sexual violence against protagonist Blanche DuBois with Homer’s neglect toward Marge, who stars in a community theatre musical production of the play. Fox could not

¹⁷⁰ “Lisa’s First Word DVD Commentary,” *The Simpsons: The Complete Fourth Season* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox/Gracie Films, 2004); “Cape Feare DVD Commentary,” *The Simpsons: The Complete Fifth Season* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox/Gracie Films, 2004).

¹⁷¹ Liane Hansen, “The Maestro of D’Oh Makes a New Soundtrack,” *NPR*, September 9, 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14234898>.

¹⁷² “Homer’s Barbershop Quartet,” *The Simpsons*, Season 5, Episode 1, September 30, 1993; “Colonel Homer,” *The Simpsons*, Season 3, Episode 20, March 26, 1992.

¹⁷³ Richard Buskin, “Sounding Out *The Simpsons*,” *Studio Sound*, February 1, 1998, 54.

acquire the publishing rights, so Clausen's team and the writing staff wrote a libretto and score that did not include any lines from the play.¹⁷⁴ Clausen later applied these talents to other musical homages, including "Marge vs. the Monorail," a riff on *The Music Man* penned by staff writer Conan O'Brien, and "Bart After Dark," an episode about Bart's apprenticeship at a burlesque house influenced by *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*.¹⁷⁵ This aspect of the show's production became incredibly demanding, requiring the show's music editor, Chris Ledesma, to work with the cast and guest performers while Clausen oversaw the show's orchestra for weekly sessions.¹⁷⁶ It required considerable foresight and coordination between the show's musical, acting, writing, and animation talent. Clausen told Hansen that after the writers provide him lyrics as part of the script, he recorded demos with an ensemble. Then:

Once the demo is done, if there are cast voices to go on the tracks, we then record the cast voices to that track, make a composite mix of all that, and send it to the animators. And the animators actually animate to those tracks, and then it comes back to me seven to eight months later in the final episode ... And then once it comes back and I hear the song in the final episode then I throw away the small instrumental track and I replace it with a full orchestra to make you think that you're hearing the entire Broadway vibe.¹⁷⁷

In an effort to honor the show's musical reputation and Clausen's labor, Warner-owned Rhino Records released *Songs in the Key of Springfield* in March 1997, a year after Fox's supernatural thriller *The X-Files* released the similarly titled *Songs in the Key of X* alt-rock

¹⁷⁴ "A Streetcar Named Marge DVD Commentary," *The Simpsons: The Complete Third Season* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox/Gracie Films, 2004).

¹⁷⁵ "Bart After Dark," *The Simpsons*, Season 8, Episode 5, November 24, 1996; "Marge Vs. the Monorail," *The Simpsons*, Season 4, Episode 12, January 14, 1993.

¹⁷⁶ Buskin, "Sounding Out *The Simpsons*."

¹⁷⁷ Hansen, "The Maestro of D'Oh Makes a New Soundtrack."

compilation.¹⁷⁸ “We get lots and lots of fan mail begging us to put out original soundtrack music from the show, so this is partly a service to the fanatics,” Groening told *Billboard*, identifying himself with the compilation’s intended audience of devoted, knowledgeable followers. “They ask for songs or cues that I barely remember and because we cram so much stuff into each episode, these cues are very short. But I’m the kind of guy who plays [Warner Bros. cartoon scorer] Carl Stalling in my car, and if you’re a ‘Simpsons’ fan, the album allows you to listen to the music in a different context.”¹⁷⁹ The compilation was designed to accommodate multiple radio formats as well. “Programmers can have a lot of fun with the music, and using the dialogue for intros and outros” Rhino product manager Emily Cagan told reporter Jim Bessman. “We’re targeting rock stations, oldies, country, top 40, album rock, AM radio, and nationally syndicated shows. We’re servicing the entire album to let people run loose with it.”¹⁸⁰ But *Songs in the Key of Springfield* did not establish a clear target demographic through its radio placement campaign, as rock, country, and top 40 stations have wide-ranging demographic appeals on the basis of age and gender that cannot easily be reduced or broken down. The soundtrack’s promotional strategy also did not rely on a lead single, as *Songs in the Key of X* did with the release of Foo Fighters’ cover of Gary Numan’s “Down in the Park,” which gave the compilation national exposure on alternative stations that courted young adult listeners in ways that *Springfield* could not.¹⁸¹ However, the decision to service radio stations with the entire album, which included short songs from the program’s first several seasons along with character dialogue appealed to the show’s more ardent fanbase who could decipher the soundtrack’s various in-text references.

¹⁷⁸ Martin Keller, “Space is the Place: Rockers Look to the Skies in Search of UFOs,” *Rolling Stone* 734 (1996): 21-22.

¹⁷⁹ Jim Bessman, “Cowabunga! It’s a ‘Simpsons’ Set: Rhino Album Features Show’s Music, Dialogue,” *Billboard* 109, no. 7 (1997): 18.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Keller, “Space is the Place.”

While it did not outsell *Simpsons Sings the Blues*, *Songs in the Key of Springfield* did demonstrate the program's musical legacy by showcasing Elfman's original theme song and Clausen's various permutations of it over the life of the series, then in its eighth season. It also hinted at the theme's song enduring legacy. Among many versions, the compilation included a cover of Elfman's theme by mambo legend Tito Puente.¹⁸² Such versioning would recur in the season's penultimate episode, "Homerpalooza." A send-up on the commodification of alternative rock and Generation X, the episode centers on Homer trying to get into contemporary music in order to relate to his pre-adolescent children by taking them to Hullabalooza, a day-long music festival clearly modeled after Lollapalooza. In the episode, Sonic Youth bassist and guest voice actor Kim Gordon explains that Hullabalooza is "about music, and advertising, and youth-oriented product positioning," a description that could easily have been applied to *The Simpsons* in its early 90s heyday.¹⁸³ Her band covers the show's theme over the end credits, which includes looped animation of gloomy teenagers swaying to their feedback-laden reinterpretation of Elfman's melody. Their version was not included in *Songs in the Key of Springfield*, perhaps due to their contract with the Geffen-owned DGC label. Nonetheless, Groening was honored to have them cover it as a long-time fan of the noise rock group, in part because it most closely captured the sound the cartoonist wanted for the show's theme song when he originally suggested that Sonic Youth collaborator John Zorn write it.¹⁸⁴ *The Simpsons'* theme song would continue to be reinterpreted by rock bands like Yo La Tengo, Fallout Boy, and Green Day, whose version was included in *The Simpsons Movie* and released by Warner Bros., helping extend a musical legacy that would endure alongside Clausen's more overtly classical stewardship of the program's

¹⁸² "Who Shot Mr. Burns? (Part 2)," *The Simpsons*, Season 7, Episode 1, September 17, 1995.

¹⁸³ "Homerpalooza," *The Simpsons*, Season 7, Episode 24, May 19, 1996.

¹⁸⁴ "Homerpalooza DVD Commentary," *The Simpsons: The Complete Seventh Season* (Hollywood: 20th Century Fox/Gracie Films, 2005).

score. Rock music and Romanticism's co-existence informed another series that made a big splash on network television at the dawn of the 1990s. Though *Twin Peaks* had a different trajectory, it also used its theme song's commercial appeal to serve its fanbase.

The Lonely Girl in the Back of the Woods

Twin Peaks' sound was an eclectic pastiche of sources that "incorporate[d] pop, blues, some country, soft rock, film noir—no question about that—nightmarish stuff," as composer Angelo Badalamenti once described it.¹⁸⁵ In particular, critic John Rockwell identified the prominence of the synthesizer in the composer's score, an element that lent its sonic textures "a gloss both traditional, in the synthesizer's mimicking of conventional instruments, and disturbingly off-center, in that the imitations—and the frequent use of eerie slides and quarter-tones—invest everything with an electronic glow, as if the music were radioactive."¹⁸⁶ However, much of the program's sonic aesthetic—a strange brew of sedated rockabilly guitar, peppy upright bass, and gauzy female vocals unsettled by the looming spectral presence of ominous synth melodies and flourishes—were already in place due to Badalamenti's pre-established professional relationship with director David Lynch on *Blue Velvet*. The film helped establish Lynch's thematic preoccupations with women in peril, duality, mysticism, and curdled Americana, which explained why the director described the project as a "*Blue Velvet* soap opera."¹⁸⁷ These thematic interests were aided by Badalamenti's haunting score and singer Julee Cruise's ethereal voice, which would contribute to *Twin Peaks*' disquieting sensibility.

On *Blue Velvet*, Badalamenti and Lynch were tested by a difficult production issue. The director was obsessed with goth supergroup This Mortal Coil's moody cover of troubadour Tim

¹⁸⁵ Kory Grow, "Dream Team," *Rolling Stone*, July 25, 2014. <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/news/dream-team-the-semi-mysterious-story-behind-the-music-of-twin-peaks-20140725>.

¹⁸⁶ Rockwell, "The Music That Haunt's 'Twin Peaks.'"

¹⁸⁷ *Inside Twin Peaks*, October 6, 1990.

Buckley's "Song to the Siren." In particular, he was taken by Cocteau Twins' frontwoman Elizabeth Fraser's romantic, darkly contemplative vocal performance. However, the production struggled to acquire the rights to the recording, which included synchronization fees to the outfit's label, 4AD, and publishing fees to Buckley's estate and the song's co-writer Larry Beckett. Though Fraser, her partner Robin Guthrie, and 4AD owner Ivo Watts-Russell were willing to license the song, Buckley's lawyers were uncooperative.¹⁸⁸ In addition, veteran producer Dino DiLaurentiis, whose company distributed *Blue Velvet*, was unwilling to cover licensing costs, which Watts-Russell estimated at \$20,000 but Badalamenti believed to be closer to \$50,000.¹⁸⁹ Thus Lynch and Badalamenti basically created a soundalike. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Badalamenti recalled that Lynch gave him instructions to "compose something with no beginning and no end" and of "ethereal beauty," along with handwritten lyrics:

David reluctantly agreed to write a lyric, and he thought writing a new song was absolutely preposterous because "Song to the Siren" was his favorite song of all time. But Isabella [Rossellini] came to the recording studio, where we were recording [the score for] *Blue Velvet*, and she handed me a little piece of yellow paper [that] said, "Sometimes a wind blows and you and I float in love and kiss forever in a darkness and the mysteries of love come clear . . ." I'm reading this and saying, "Hey man, where are the rhymes?

And more important, where are the hooks that a song needs?"¹⁹⁰

After reading Lynch's note, Badalamenti sat behind his keyboard and played a "long, soft sustained, wide-voiced B major chord" for nearly a minute before "[t]he melody just floated out" for the song that would become *Blue Velvet*'s theme, "Mysteries of Love."¹⁹¹ Badalamenti also

¹⁸⁸ Martin Aston. *Facing the Other Way: The Story of 4AD* (London: The Friday Project, 2014), 172.

¹⁸⁹ Grow, "Dream Team."

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

brought in Cruise. He first met her as a cast member in a Greenwich Village production of his musical, *The Boys in the Live Country Band*, and periodically hired her to sing for commercials.¹⁹² For her *Blue Velvet* recording session, Cruise was able to conjure Fraser's meditative soprano, as well as connect with the song on both an emotional and technical level. Cruise observed that "[t]he pentameter of 'Mysteries of Love' is very French horn-like, and I was a French horn major in grad school. The vocal has got to be pure. There are no scoops. It was very hard to put vibrato in there and be confident enough to do it that soft. I'm the funny one, the big belter; I wasn't this. But I thought of it as singing like the soloist in a boys' choir."¹⁹³

Blue Velvet was a critical success and created a foundation for future projects between Lynch and Badalamenti. The director also approached Cruise, who he did not meet until after *Blue Velvet's* release, to see if she would be interested in working with the pair on a musical project through Warner Bros.¹⁹⁴ By 1988, Lynch had been hired by Warner Bros. to direct a film adaptation of *Goddess*, Anthony Summers' lurid Marilyn Monroe biography, which he was slated to co-write with *Hill Street Blues* story editor Mark Frost.¹⁹⁵ But while the director "loved the idea of this woman in trouble," he had reservations about "it being a real story" instead of a work of narrative fiction. Thus he proceeded to develop a crime saga around the death of small-town homecoming queen Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) and the townspeople implicated in her murder.¹⁹⁶ Lynch imbued Palmer with much of Monroe's tragic femininity as a popular and accomplished high school student with a secret life plagued by cocaine addiction and forced prostitution as ugly manifestations of the damage she endured at the hands of her father and

¹⁹² Simon Reynolds, "The Secret Diary of Julee Cruise," *Melody Maker* 67, no. 7 (1991): 8-9.

¹⁹³ Grow, "Dream Team."

¹⁹⁴ Reynolds, "The Secret Diary of Julee Cruise."

¹⁹⁵ Richard B. Woodward, "When 'Blue Velvet' Meets 'Hill Street Blues,'" *New York Times*, April 8, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/08/arts/television-when-blue-velvet-meets-hill-street-blues.html>.

¹⁹⁶ Chris Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1997).

many of the adult male residents in the deceptively wholesome northwestern town. The pair refined Lynch's idea, which originally grew out of Lynch's session with Badalamenti where he talked about a vision he had of a young girl lost in the dark woods that the composer then set to music, and pitched it as a murder mystery in *Peyton Place*. Badalamenti remembered Lynch describing an early image of *Twin Peaks*' tragic central character while the composer was in the studio working on Cruise's album as "this lonely girl coming out of a dark wood, and an owl in the background. We started playing with that ominous thing that everyone associates with *Twin Peaks*, and David was like 'That's it, that's it! Just keep it going!'"¹⁹⁷ That improvised melody became "Laura's Theme," *Twin Peaks*' bruised leitmotif. By Badalamenti's recollection, Lynch told him not to "change a note. You've captured 75% of the tone of *Twin Peaks*."¹⁹⁸

ABC Entertainment's president Brandon Stoddard greenlit *Twin Peaks* in the fall of 1988.¹⁹⁹ The two-hour *Twin Peaks*' pilot established the setting, principle ensemble, and central criminal investigation, but it did not identify Palmer's killer. That was by design, as Lynch wanted the program's central mystery to remain unsolved.²⁰⁰ As the series unraveled, the show was supposed to pursue several interlocking and digressive storylines involving Palmer's family, classmates, the police and FBI agents assigned to her case, *Twin Peaks*' political and business establishment, and the criminal underworld with whom both Palmer and the town's leadership made strange bedfellows.²⁰¹ Stoddard was uncertain about this aspect of the series, but appeared to placate Lynch enough to convince the filmmaker to shoot an alternate ending so that ABC

¹⁹⁷ Reesman, "A Passion for Improvisation," 56.

¹⁹⁸ *Inside Twin Peaks*, October 6, 1990.

¹⁹⁹ Jim Jerome, "The Triumph of 'Twin Peaks,'" *Entertainment Weekly*, April 6, 1990. <http://www.ew.com/article/1990/04/06/triumph-twin-peaks>; Steve Weinstein, "The Other Peak," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1990. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-29/entertainment/ca-1318_1_twin-peaks.

²⁰⁰ Jeff Jensen, "David Lynch Talks 'Twin Peaks,'" *Entertainment Weekly*, October 26, 2007. <http://www.ew.com/article/2007/10/26/david-lynch-talks-twin-peaks>.

²⁰¹ Michel Chion, *David Lynch* (London: British Film Institute, 1995).

could sell *Twin Peaks* as a feature film to the European market if the network decided not to pick up the series.²⁰² Stoddard may also have been biding his time, as he stepped down as president when the series went into production. He was replaced by Robert A. Iger, who had serious misgivings about the show's irresolution because he believed that its surrealist tone and gruesome subject matter would already be difficult selling points. But Iger presented a united front to *Entertainment Weekly*, claiming that "there is some risk involved whenever you do something as different as this. And the feel of this program is unlike that of any other program on TV. But even to say 'risk' implies a lack of confidence I have in the show, which wouldn't be correct."²⁰³ However, Lynch and Iger disagreed on whether to solve the show's central mystery. Lynch eventually resolved Palmer's murder during season two, with Cruise's assistance.

While *Twin Peaks*' first season was in production, Cruise signed with Warner Bros. and recorded her debut album, *Floating Into the Night*, which was released in September 1989. Lynch and Badalamenti were the album's producers. The former was credited as its only songwriter, while the latter oversaw composition and arrangement. The idea for the album grew out of the trio's success with *Blue Velvet*. Cruise would take on the subjectivity of Lynch's image of a tragically lovelorn woman, which the singer described as a "demented erotic doll," rather than singing as herself.²⁰⁴ Cruise claimed that playing the part "didn't cause me any problems, apart from the fact that she's so calm, whereas I'm not calm at all. I think there's a neurosis underneath, it's like a controlled madness. Underneath the elegance, she's seething. But she's not burnt out, and she's not defeated. She's really tormented, but she has no power to get it out."²⁰⁵ Thus Cruise's vocal performance, which was decidedly higher and girlier than her

²⁰² Troy Patterson and Jeff Jensen, "Our Town," *Entertainment Weekly* 540 (2000): 92-102.

²⁰³ Jerome, "The Triumph of 'Twin Peaks.'"

²⁰⁴ Simon Reynolds, "Julee Cruise: A Haunting We Will Go." *Melody Maker* 66, no. 8 (1990): 42.

²⁰⁵ Simon Reynolds, "Julee Cruise: Twin to the Night." *Melody Maker* 66, no. 44 (1990): 8.

natural register, embodied Palmer's apparitional femininity. Cruise would also describe her character's voice as "a white angel sound ... somewhere between the '50s and '90s."²⁰⁶ The music "does lack any time, any kind of soul. It doesn't make you want to get up and move. If there's any black input, it's a kind of beatnik, cool jazz thing. It's Angelo's way of being soulful."²⁰⁷ This coincided with Badalamenti's view of *Twin Peaks*' musical sensibility, which exists "in a kind of pre- or post-rock 'n' roll era. It's another time and another place. There are no James Brown characters stalking about, for sure."²⁰⁸ Thus Cruise stood in for that horrifyingly "pure" version of white femininity, suspended over the sock hop, the kitchen, and men's expectations. Through Palmer, Cruise haunted *Twin Peaks* as a structuring absence for the show's theme song and as a televisual presence with a performance that solved Palmer's murder.

One of the songs Badalamenti, Cruise, and Lynch recorded during the *Floating* sessions was "Falling," which was released as the album's lead single. The original version, which featured Cruise's wispy vocals, appeared on the debut that arrived in record stores in fall 1989. Music critic Tom Ewing would later describe the beguiling track as "one of the decade's simplest and warmest love songs" wrapped around a "dreamy, echo-drenched gentility" that is brought to life by "the mystery and romance [of] Julee Cruise's frost-delicate voice."²⁰⁹ But the uneasy combination of Badalamenti's cavernous guitar, slow-blooming synth washes, and Cruise's vapor-thin soprano suggest conflict when paired with Lynch's lyrics. The song opens with Cruise whispering "don't let yourself be hurt this time" as a mantra of self-preservation.²¹⁰ This is a curious sentiment on which to introduce a love song. The chorus unfolds with similar

²⁰⁶ Craig S. Semon, "'Floating' is Simply Adrift for Julee Cruise," *Telegram & Gazette* (October 8, 1989): 11.

²⁰⁷ Reynolds, "Twin to the Night."

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Tom Ewing, "The Top 200 Tracks of the 1990s: 150-101," *Pitchfork*, August 30, 2010. <http://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/7850-the-top-200-tracks-of-the-1990s-150-101/>.

²¹⁰ Julee Cruise, "Falling," *Floating Into the Night* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1989).

ambivalence. Cruise's protagonist expresses surprise that the weather is unchanged after experiencing the disorientation of her lover's kiss, leading her to ask "[a]re we falling in love?"²¹¹ Cruise would later describe "Falling," along with the other songs on *Floating* as being about infatuation rather than real love, a sensibility she believed to be driven by "[d]espair and obsession. The neediness. The music's very *needy*."²¹² The song's knife-edge balance between romantic fervor and existential dread also helped establish *Twin Peaks*' tone.

"Falling" doubled as the program's haunting theme song. Importantly, it was the instrumental version. Unlike *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* and *The Simpsons*, which used their theme songs to introduce characters by name in order to establish them for the programs' audiences, *Twin Peaks* refused to name anybody. This was carried over into the credits' visuals, which consisted of singular images—a wren perched on a branch, a factory emitting smoke, the inner workings of a machine, the town's idyllic welcome sign, a wide shot of a churning waterfall, and a lake's rippling surface. There is no footage of townsfolk in the credit sequence nor are there introductory images of the program's ensemble cast, which give it a deserted quality. It also nods to the pilot's first scene, which introduces Palmer as a corpse fished from a riverbank. The opening credits also felt long for television, establishing a very slow musical pace for a sequence that stretched past a minute and a half and held on slow-moving images as the title card and various above-the-line credits appeared in bright green and orange letters against the sequence's autumnal palette. If Danny Elfman claimed that composers had to make a statement quickly with a television theme song, *Twin Peaks*' credit sequence turned duration and lack into ways to differentiate the show from its competitors.²¹³ For those familiar with the original single, the

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Reynolds, "A Haunting We Will Go."

²¹³ Mermelstein, "TV's Frenetic Grandeur."

omission of Cruise's vocals was also striking. But Cruise's silence helped facilitate absence as the opening credit's central theme, particularly because her voice represented the memory of a dead girl cut down by evil forces. Though the specific perpetrators and motives for Palmer's brutal fate were not addressed in the opening credits, the instrumental version of "Falling" became the catalyst for *Twin Peaks*' key question: who killed Laura Palmer? The mystery was eventually solved to some objection, with Cruise's voice contributing to its resolution.

Though *Twin Peaks* enjoyed initial critical and ratings success, the second season struggled to hold viewer interest due to the irresolution of the show's central storyline and various timeslot changes. The premiere garnered 19.1 million viewers, a respectable showing but a far cry from the returns ABC received for a pilot watched by 34.6 million people. Worse, subsequent episodes weathered a precipitous decline in viewership, eventually resulting in an indefinite hiatus mid-season before a successful fan campaign convinced the network to burn off the final six episodes.²¹⁴ Lynch had all but abandoned the project as well, shifting his attention toward his latest feature, *Wild at Heart*, which won the Palme D'or at Cannes in May 1990.²¹⁵ However, Lynch directed the first two episodes of the second season, the finale, and "Lonely Souls," a mid-season episode that revealed Palmer's killer.²¹⁶ In "Lonely Souls," Cruise ostensibly appears as herself with a backing band at a local watering hole. *Floating* had been out for over a year by the time the episode aired and had done modest business. It peaked at number 74 on the *Billboard* Top 200 while "Falling" was shy of cracking the Alternative Songs chart's

²¹⁴ "'Twin Peaks' Canceled As a Saturday Regular," *New York Times*, February 16, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/16/arts/twin-peaks-canceled-as-a-saturday-regular.html>; Mark Harris, "Saturday Night Dead," *Entertainment Weekly*, March 8, 1991. <http://www.ew.com/article/1991/03/08/will-twin-peaks-get-second-chance>.

²¹⁵ Larry Rohter, "David Lynch Pushes America to the Edge," *New York Times*, August 12, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/12/movies/david-lynch-pushes-america-to-the-edge.html?scp=79&sq=%22Twin+Peaks%22&st=nyt>.

²¹⁶ "Lonely Souls," *Twin Peaks*, Season 2, Episode 7, November 10, 1990.

top ten.²¹⁷ Therefore “Lonely Souls,” which prominently featured two songs from the album, gave the album potential additional exposure to both die-hard fans and casual viewers.

In the episode, the singer lip syncs *Floating*'s second single, “Rockin’ Back Inside My Heart,” and its closer, “The World Spins.” Cruise performs the first song as various townsfolk come together, including Palmer’s best friend Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle) and ex-boyfriend James Hurley (James Marshall), a couple who were working with Palmer’s identical cousin Maddy to find her killer, and FBI agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), who booked department store owner Ben Horne (Richard Beymer) for Palmer’s murder earlier in the episode and suspects he caught the wrong man. Hayward reconnects with Hurley by mouthing the song’s title along to Cruise’s performance while its rollicking tempo puts the patrons in good spirits. But Cooper is obviously disquieted, his furrowed brow framed in medium close-up as Cruise sings “Tell your heart, you make me cry/Tell your heart, don’t let me die.”²¹⁸ Immediately after Cruise’s performance, Cooper has a vision of a local man who warns him, “it is happening again,” and then a re-staging of Palmer’s murder between Maddy and Palmer’s father Leland (Ray Wise) while possessed by an evil spirit (embodied by Frank Silva). This harrowingly violent sequence is immediately followed by Cruise’s solemn performance of “The World Spins.” As the singer pleads “Love, don’t go away/Come back this way/Come back and stay/Forever and ever/Please stay,” Haraway weeps as she did on the night of Palmer’s murder while Cooper realizes he needs to track down Leland Palmer.²¹⁹ The episode won a ratings spike that ABC ultimately could not sustain. However, “Lonely Souls” strengthened Cruise’s role as

²¹⁷ Grow, “Dream Team.”

²¹⁸ Julee Cruise, “Rockin’ Back Inside My Heart,” *Floating Into the Night* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1989).

²¹⁹ Cruise, “The World Spins,” *Floating Into the Night* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 1989).

Palmer's avatar by allowing the singer to raise her voice in reaction to Palmer's death, and thus give the character some minor sense of agency that the "Falling" instrumental obfuscates.

While *Twin Peaks*' ratings began to cool between its first and second seasons, there was still tremendous interest in its merchandising potential. Companies like Hamilton Projects Inc. attempted to monetize the show's various quirks, including a collection of neckties patterned after Palmer's psychiatrist Dr. Jacoby's love for Hawaiian shirts and a line of branded coffee and cherry pies that nodded to Cooper's diner staple obsessions.²²⁰ A year later, trading card company Star Pics released a collection supervised by Frost and Lynch that offered random and minute trivia to the show's superfans, like the Log Lady's astrological sign.²²¹ Paramount-owned Simon & Schuster's Pocket Books division acquired the licensing rights for a collection of tie-in novels and an audiobook series that presented clues and details for the production to plant, pick up, and elaborate upon during the upcoming season.²²² In addition to the tie-in novels, the Badalamenti- and Lynch-produced *Soundtrack from Twin Peaks* also received intense critical interest upon its release through Warner Bros. in September 1990, a few weeks before the second season premiere.²²³ The strategy fed the program's ardent fan base. Critic Peter Goddard declared, "*Twin Peaks* did not just revolutionize what we see on TV. In its eerily quiet way, David Lynch's New Age melodrama changed what we'll *hear* on the tube too."²²⁴ The

²²⁰ Meg Cox, "Will 'Twin Peaks' Get Fans to Read Between the Lines," *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 1990, B6A.

²²¹ Mike Duffy, "'Twin Peaks' Trading Cards, Quirks and All," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1991. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-04-25/features/9102060657_1_twin-peaks-trading-cards-log-lady-fbi-agent-dale-cooper.

²²² Alessandra Stanley, "Are the Owls What They Seem?," *New York Times*, October 28, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/books/are-the-owls-what-they-seem.html>; Ken Tucker, "The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer," *Entertainment Weekly*, October 5, 1990. <http://www.ew.com/topic/secret-diary-laura-palmer>;

²²³ Rockwell, "The Music That Haunt's 'Twin Peaks.'"

²²⁴ Peter Goddard, "Twin Peaks Alters Our Sense: See Evil, Hear Evil," *Chatelaine* 63, no. 10 (1990): 18.

compilation went gold in fifteen countries, a notable accomplishment for a television soundtrack.²²⁵ Badalamenti also earned a BPI Award and a BFI Award for his work.²²⁶

Arguably, however, Badalamenti's score was attractive to fans precisely because it did not change what viewers heard on television. The composer had a classical style that was heavily associated with and indebted to Hollywood film composers like Max Steiner, Nino Rota, Ennio Morricone, and Bernard Herrmann, to whom he was sometimes compared.²²⁷ In particular, Badalamenti relied extensively on leitmotifs that were repeated throughout *Twin Peaks*' two-season run. It minimized the intensity of Badalamenti's labor on the production considerably. He did not have to constantly generate new music for the show week to week because the show's editing team could simply patch in a leitmotif wherever the composer or Lynch designated it to go. Thus while Badalamenti was integral to Lynch's pre-production process, he was not tethered to the post-production grind of television composition work. This in turn allowed him to work on other film projects alongside *Twin Peaks*, including *Wild at Heart*. While Badalamenti's output did increase during the second season due to ABC's 22-episode order and a larger cast of characters who needed their own cues, he only composed eight leitmotifs for the show's initial seven-episode run. This is in sharp contrast to a figure like Mark Mothersbaugh, who ostensibly wrote multiple standalone albums' worth of original material during the first season of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*. For example, Ben Horne's intrepid daughter Audrey had her own theme, a slinky jazz number that featured upright bass, which was first introduced in "Traces to Nowhere" and was used multiple times in her scenes.²²⁸ In addition, an abbreviated version of Badalamenti's "Love Theme" accompanied the end credits to each episode, which was

²²⁵ Reesman, "A Passion for Improvisation," 54, 56-58; Grow, "Dream Team."

²²⁶ Reesman, "A Passion for Improvisation," 56.

²²⁷ Rockwell, "The Music That Haunt's 'Twin Peaks.'"

²²⁸ "Traces of Nowhere," *Twin Peaks*, Season 1, Episode 2, April 12, 1990.

comprised of a static image of Palmer's yearbook photo. Palmer had her own theme, a mournful synth-driven tune, which became so ubiquitous that it enjoyed a separate commercial life when electronic artist Moby sampled the two-note melody for his 1990 club hit "Go."²²⁹ Though these themes were creatively significant to *Twin Peaks* and allowed Badalamenti and Lynch to deepen storylines and establish affective bonds, they also provided valuable shorthand for characterization through repetition and variation that streamlined Badalamenti's labor.

Finally, *Soundtrack from Twin Peaks* allowed Badalamenti and Lynch to repackage songs from *Floating* due to their deal with Warner Bros. The compilation included the original version of "Falling," along with "The Nightingale" and "Into the Night." Many critics were ultimately dismissive of Cruise's contributions, perceiving them as padding and Cruise's act to be a highly contrived form of cross-promotion that had no musical merits of its own and detracted from the program's supposedly more artistically substantial ruminations on sexual violence, women's objectification, small-town corruption, humankind's duality, and the dangerous lure of nostalgia. For example, John Rockwell claimed in his review that "it is Mr. Badalamenti's instrumentals that define the atmosphere more than her warbling."²³⁰ Stephen Holden offered a more backhanded compliment of Cruise, who he described as "an amusing post-punk caricature of a torch singer."²³¹ Such criticism frequently overlooked Cruise's central function as Palmer's stand-in, ignored the singer's professional experience, and framed her contributions as dependent upon Badalamenti's and Lynch's achievements rather than the product of a shared creative vision that relied on her participation. However, Cruise's music for *Twin Peaks* endured long after ABC cancelled the series. Indeed, she was an integral part of the program's mythology.

²²⁹ Marisa Fox, "The Top Ten, Technically Talking," *Entertainment Weekly* 123 (1992): 68.

²³⁰ Rockwell, "The Music That Haunt's 'Twin Peaks.'"

²³¹ Stephen Holden, "Torch Songs with 'Twin Peaks' Overtones," *New York Times*, November 18, 1990. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/18/arts/review-music-torch-songs-with-twin-peaks-overtones.html>.

Several alternative bands and electronic acts covered her music, and subsequent generations of female singer-songwriters like Lana Del Rey and Bat for Lashes were inspired by the singer's narcotized bombshell shtick and sang "like sexy baby girls," as Cruise later described her legacy.²³² Many of these artists came of age with *Twin Peaks* and were fascinated by Palmer's volatile femininity and drew inspiration from Cruise's performance to question women's desire, glamorous self-presentation, and deep reserves of anger and anxiety as songwriters and producers who did not need a Badalamenti or a Lynch to help execute their vision.²³³

In the short term, *Twin Peaks* hobbled to the finish line. ABC did not renew the show for a third season and the grisly 1992 prequel film, *Fire Walk with Me*, tanked at the box office after Lynch struggled to acquire an American distributor for it before New Line stepped in. However, Warner Bros. still stood behind *Twin Peaks*' musical output. The label released Badalamenti's score in August, a few weeks before the film's short U.S. theatrical run. Though the *Fire Walk with Me* soundtrack failed to do the same business for the label as *Soundtrack from Twin Peaks* or *Floating Into the Night*, Badalamenti still received various accolades for his work. Warner Bros. did not extend that offer to the program's second season; Lynch released the soundtrack on his imprint Absurda in 2007. Yet the show enjoyed a rich afterlife. In 1993 Bravo acquired the rights to rerun *Twin Peaks* under its programming banner, "TV Too Good for TV," a distinction bestowed upon cancelled series with "unique artistic vision and critical acclaim rather than ratings or volume of episodes."²³⁴ The series was also released on several formats for the home viewing market, though none of them included the pilot until Paramount released an expensive

²³² Sheldon Pearce, "Xiu Xiu Announce 'Twin Peaks' Covers Album, Share 'Falling,'" *Pitchfork*, March 9 2016. <http://pitchfork.com/news/64014-xiu-xiu-announce-twin-peaks-covers-album-share-falling/>; Christopher R. Weingarten, "She's Filled With Secrets," *Spin* 28, no. 2 (2012): 96-98.

²³³ Grow, "Dream Team."

²³⁴ Richard Klein, "Bravo Picks Up 'Peaks,'" *Variety*, January 17, 1993. <http://variety.com/1993/tv/news/bravo-picks-up-peaks-103041/>.

commemorative DVD box set in 2007.²³⁵ Finally, Lynch briefly entertained the prospect of returning to ABC to develop a show about the film industry through Touchstone Pictures.²³⁶ Ultimately, *Mulholland Drive* was reimagined as a feature film in 2001 and released through Universal. The project also served as Lynch's last collaboration with Badalamenti, whose score was nominated for a BAFTA and a Golden Globe.²³⁷ However *Twin Peaks*' enduring legacy eventually reunited the pair with Cruise, a fitting development given the show and its score's shared obsession with music and television's strange preoccupations with the past.

Making Their Own Conveyor Belts

At the 1987 Daytime Emmy Awards, *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* received twelve nominations and won half as many prizes for its first season. Chief among its victories were for Outstanding Art Direction, which Gary Panter shared with his team, and Outstanding Graphics and Title Design, an honor bestowed upon Prudence Fenton and Phil Trumbo.²³⁸ Mark Mothersbaugh was never nominated for his work on *Playhouse*; indeed, he would not even be eligible until 1991, during the program's last season, when the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences added the Original Song category.²³⁹ However, Mothersbaugh's efforts contributed to these wins.²⁴⁰ In addition, Mothersbaugh parlayed this success into more composition work. After *Playhouse* went off the air in 1990—a mutual decision between CBS and Reubens, despite the air of scandal that clouded its cancellation after Reubens was arrested for indecent exposure in an adult

²³⁵ Ken Tucker, "Twin Peaks: The Definitive Gold Box Edition," *Entertainment Weekly*, October 26, 2007. <http://www.ew.com/article/2007/10/26/twin-peaks-definitive-gold-box-edition>.

²³⁶ Andrew Pulver, "Now You See It," *The Guardian*, May 11, 2001. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/may/11/cannes2001.culture>.

²³⁷ Daniel Schweiger, "The Madman and His Muse: Composer Angelo Badalamenti Takes Another Wild Ride with Director David Lynch for 'Mulholland Drive,'" *Film Score Monthly* 6, no. 8 (2001): 24-27, 44; "And the Winner Is..." *Hollywood Reporter* 371, no. 36 (2002): S28-S29.

²³⁸ Gaines, *Inside Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

²³⁹ Michael Logan, "Finally Comedy Could Be King of the Day," *TV Guide* 39, no. 25 (1991): 8-9.

²⁴⁰ "CBS Again Sweeps Daytime Emmys, Led By Pee-Wee," *Variety* 331, no. 4 (1988): 144.

film theater and the network pulled series reruns—Mothersbaugh was approached to score *Adventures in Wonderland* for the Disney Channel.²⁴¹ The workload was substantial, and he enlisted Devo members to help shoulder it.²⁴² After breaking with Warner Bros., the band endured a brief stint with Enigma in the late 1980s. Devo re-teamed with Warner for 1990's *Smooth Noodle Maps* and twenty years later with 2010's *Something for Everybody*, with the company releasing multiple compilations and rarities collections in the interim. This ultimately resulted in Devo founding Mutato Muzika in 1989, an independently owned music studio where they composed original music for clients in the television, film, and eventually advertising and gaming industries, including Nickelodeon's *Rugrats*, Sony's *Crash Bandicoot* series, and Wes Anderson's early films.²⁴³ In 2007, Mothersbaugh began hosting "Mark's Magic Pictures," a recurring drawing tutorial on children's show *Yo Gabba Gabba!*, after his two daughters responded favorably to a pilot screener that Nickelodeon sent to Mutato Muzika. In particular, Mothersbaugh liked that the segment demonstrated drawing as "a good communication tool," and related it to his interactions with his older daughter, who he and his wife adopted from China when she was five and with whom he primarily spoke in pictures while she was learning English.²⁴⁴ Mothersbaugh attributed Mutato Muzika's founding to his Midwestern upbringing. He grew up in "a factory town, until they closed our factories and we had nothing to do. I'm one of the lucky ones who figured out how to make his own conveyors belts."²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Sheli Teitelbaum, "What's a Nice Jewish Boy...?," *The Jerusalem Report* August 22, 1991, 41; Michael Clark, "Sleeping Devo Lives on at Mutato," *Shoot* 35, no. 6 (1994): 18.

²⁴² Roberts, "Are You Not Devo? You Are Mutato."

²⁴³ Clark, "Sleeping Devo Lives on at Mutato"; Roberts, "Are You Not Devo? You Are Mutato"; Colin Stutz, "Mark Mothersbaugh Reveals Next Project at Billboard/THR Film & TV Music Conference," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 5, 2014. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/mark-mothersbaugh-reveals-next-project-746946>.

²⁴⁴ Gwynne Watkins, "Devo Star Mark Mothersbaugh Talks Yo Gabba Gabba," *Babble*, July 13, 2015. <https://www.babble.com/celebrity/mark-mothersbaugh-of-devo-yo-gabba-gabba-and-his-kids/>.

²⁴⁵ Peter Margasak, "It Takes a Worried Man," *Chicago Reader* 34, no. 35 (2005): 24.

Unlike Mothersbaugh—whose late 1980s output was limited to daytime television—Elfman received some recognition for his contribution to *The Simpsons*. He competed alongside *Twin Peaks*' Angelo Badalamenti and David Lynch for Outstanding Achievement in Main Title Theme Music at the Primetime Emmys in 1990, an honor they both lost to short-lived ABC western *The Young Riders*.²⁴⁶ Elfman eventually received recognition for his television work fifteen years later when he won an Emmy for Outstanding Main Title Theme Music for ABC's *Desperate Housewives*, one of only a handful of songs he composed for the medium, including the theme to Fox anthology horror series *Tales From the Crypt*.²⁴⁷ By that point, Elfman had firmly established himself as a film composer.²⁴⁸ At his agent's urging, Warner Bros. commemorated his 30-plus-year relationship with Tim Burton in 2010 with an expensive limited-edition box set that exhaustively detailed the pair's shared filmography by including a hardcover book, seven hours' worth of demo tapes, and the first standalone release of Elfman's score to *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*.²⁴⁹ Finally, Elfman agreed to collaborate on an international tour.²⁵⁰ Yet despite such longevity, Elfman still felt as if he approached film score composition as though he was "starting from scratch. With every project I feel like I'm still lowering a bucket into the well and I don't know where or even if I'll hit water. There's that constant anxiety and insecurity: will I find something."²⁵¹ He also occasionally performed with Oingo Boingo,

²⁴⁶ John J. O'Connor, "42nd Annual Prime-Time Emmy Awards," *New York Times* 140 (1990): B3(N), C15(L).

²⁴⁷ "Composer Danny Elfman Scores First Emmy Award," *BMI*, September 21, 2005. <http://www.bmi.com/news/entry/234561>; Jon Burlingame, "Passion Play," *Variety* 292, no. 51 (2006): A1; Mermelstein, "TV's Frenetic Grandeur."

²⁴⁸ Appelo, "My Constant Worry Is That I'll Run Out Of Ideas"; Gallo, "The Big Score," *Billboard* 124, no. 38 (2012): 22.

²⁴⁹ Ann Donahue, "6 Questions with Danny Elfman," *Billboard* 122, no. 47 (2010): 25.

²⁵⁰ Garry Maddox, "The Simpsons Composer Takes on Dark Matter," *The Age*, October 17, 2014, 34; Marsh, "After a Hundred Scores, Danny Elfman is Still Proudly, Prolifically Weird."

²⁵¹ Marsh, "After a Hundred Scores, Danny Elfman is Still Proudly, Prolifically Weird."

including an appearance with guitarist Steve Bartek at a 2015 Halloween party at the Hollywood Bowl after a screening of Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.²⁵²

Much like Elfman's bond with Burton, Badalamenti's partnership with Lynch relied on a shared weirdness between the two men that received industrial recognition in its time. Though they went home empty-handed at the 1990 Primetime Emmys, Badalamenti won a Grammy for Best Pop Instrumental Performance for *Twin Peaks*' theme song a year later.²⁵³ They worked on all of Lynch's post-*Twin Peaks* output except for 2006's *Inland Empire*, the director's last feature film to date before pursuing other projects during the second half of the decade. After amicably parting ways with Cruise Badalamenti tried to reinvent other rock musicians, albeit to relative disinterest.²⁵⁴ Cruise only released two more albums after 1993's *The Voice of Love*, neither involving Badalamenti or Lynch, though the music they collaborated on lived on in placements in the decades after *Twin Peaks*. Badalamenti enjoyed retrospective interest in his career. In 2010, he appeared alongside veteran composers Howard Shore, Gabriel Yared, and Alberto Iglesias as a Lifetime Achievement Award recipient at the World Soundtrack Awards.²⁵⁵ A year later Lynch presented Badalamenti with the Henry Mancini Award at ASCAP's Film and Television Music Awards, an award he received alongside fellow honoree Alf Clausen.²⁵⁶

However uncontestably positive, such critical appraisal reflected the endurance of the television shows for which Badalamenti and Clausen were being recognized. Along with Mothersbaugh's and Elfman's contributions to *Playhouse* and *The Simpsons*, Badalamenti's work on *Twin Peaks* required deeper consideration for how composition impacted the reception

²⁵² Nick Romano, "See Danny Elfman Perform Oingo Boingo's 'Dead Man's Party' After 20 Years," *Entertainment Weekly*, November 1, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2015/11/01/danny-elfman-dead-mans-party>.

²⁵³ Grow, "Dream Team."

²⁵⁴ Mark Coleman, "Booth and the Bad Angel." *Rolling Stone* 745 (1996): 134, 146.

²⁵⁵ Steve Chagollan, "Movie Maestro Magic," *Variety* 420, no. 9 (2010): A5-A6.

²⁵⁶ "Angelo Badalamenti and Alf Clausen to be Honored at ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards," *ASCAP*, June 2, 2011. http://www.ascap.com/press/2011/0602_FilmTV_Awards.aspx.

of these shows over time in the creation of their respective legacies as broadcast network programs. By elaborating upon Elfman's original design, Clausen created music for one of the longest-running scripted television series in United States broadcast history.²⁵⁷ In August 2015 Badalamenti confirmed his reunion with Lynch on a *Twin Peaks* limited series for Showtime, with Lynch confirming Cruise's participation by releasing a 217-person cast list.²⁵⁸ Finally, Reubens hired Mothersbaugh for the 2016 Netflix original movie, *Pee-Wee's Big Holiday*.²⁵⁹

In many respects, the work taken on by composers like Mark Mothersbaugh, Danny Elfman, and Angelo Badalamenti proved enormously influential in the decades since *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, *The Simpsons*, and *Twin Peaks* first aired. For one, the role of the television composer enjoyed increased prominence, as demonstrated by the recognition bestowed upon Bear McCreary's contributions to *Battlestar Galactica* and *Outlander*,²⁶⁰ Michael Giacchino's musical stamp on *Lost* and *Alias*,²⁶¹ and David Porter's work on *Breaking Bad* and its prequel *Better Call Saul*.²⁶² Their prominence within the television industry, along with their fan followings from careful viewers, was in part the result of their collaborative relationships with big-name creators and showrunners like Ronald D. Moore, J. J. Abrams, and Vince Gilligan. McCreary also enjoyed additional visibility from his blog, which included meticulous details

²⁵⁷ Elizabeth Wagmeister, "'The Simpsons' Renewed for Two More Seasons," *Variety*, May 4, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/the-simpsons-renewed-season-27-fox-1201486963/>.

²⁵⁸ Michael Ausiello, "*Twin Peaks*: Another MVP Returning for Upcoming Showtime Revival," *TV Line*, August 24, 2015. <http://tvline.com/2015/08/24/twin-peaks-angelo-badalamenti-revival-showtime-soundtrack-music/>; Nellie Andreeva, "'Twin Peaks': Here Is the Full Cast of David Lynch's Showtime Reboot," *Deadline*, April 25, 2016. <http://deadline.com/2016/04/twin-peaks-full-cast-david-lynch-showtime-series-1201743122/>.

²⁵⁹ Michael Roffman, "SXSW Film Review: Pee-Wee's Big Holiday," *Consequence of Sound*, March 18, 2016. <http://consequenceofsound.net/2016/03/sxsw-film-review-pee-wees-big-holiday/>.

²⁶⁰ Emily Rome, "How 'Battlestar Galactica,' 'Outlander' Composer Bear McCreary is Raising the Bar on Music for TV," *Hitfix*, April 7, 2016. <http://www.hitfix.com/news/how-battlestar-galactica-outlander-composer-bear-mccreary-is-raising-the-bar-on-music-for-tv>.

²⁶¹ Gene Parrish, "'Lost,' 'Alias' Composer Michael Giacchino," *NPR*, May 25, 2005. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4666432>.

²⁶² Ashley Lee, "'Breaking Bad' Composer to Score 'Better Call Saul,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 6, 2014. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/breaking-bad-composer-score-better-738374>.

about his television work.²⁶³ In addition, Elfman's long-time arranger Steve Bartek was hired on as an instrumentalist for McCreary's score work on *Galactica* and *The Walking Dead*.²⁶⁴

Alongside such developments, several recording artists transitioned into full-time composition work. After his band broke up in 1998, former Shudder to Think vocalist Craig Wedren parlayed his prior experience as a composer on the MTV sketch comedy program *The State* into a second career, a feat he was able to accomplish in part because of the ensemble's extensive television and film networks.²⁶⁵ Other acts prioritized recording and touring original music but were willing to work in television on commission, as singer-songwriter Gaby Moreno did as co-writer on the theme song to NBC's *Parks and Recreation*.²⁶⁶ However, as Courtney Smith reported in *Pitchfork*, by late 2015 several television productions enlisted recording artists as composers. Sigur Rós frontman Jónsi worked on WGN historical drama *Manhattan*, Scottish post-rock group Mogwai scored BBC's *The Returned*, Rogue Wave leader Zach Rogue composed music for HBO's limited series *On Freddie Roach*, and Liz Phair worked on several projects for the CW and USA with fellow musicians Evan Frankfort and Marc "Doc" Dauer.²⁶⁷

Smith interpreted the rise of musicians as composers as a new phenomenon resulting from shrinking licensing fees for music placements, a supplemental income for many touring indie artists. "It's more a game of small ball," independent publishing house executive Lyle Hysen claimed. "[Y]ou try to get more licenses rather than a few biggies on the major networks,"

²⁶³ Bear McCreary, "Official Site," <http://www.bearmccreary.com/#category/blog/>.

²⁶⁴ Lewis Wallace, "Bear McCreary Deconstructs *Walking Dead*'s 'Zombie Banjo,'" *Wired*, November 15, 2010. <http://www.wired.com/2010/11/walking-dead-zombie-banjo/>.

²⁶⁵ "Q&A: Craig Wedren," *Spin*, July 27, 2005. <http://www.spin.com/2005/07/qa-craig-wedren/>; Marc Hawthorne, "Shudder to Think's Craig Wedren," *A.V. Club*, September 24, 2009. <http://www.avclub.com/article/shudder-to-thinks-craig-wedren-33314>; Corey Stulce, *The Union of the State* (self-published, 2016), 519-520, 528.

²⁶⁶ Ann Donahue, "'Idol,' 'SNL,' Join 'Glee' with Emmy Nominations," *Billboard*, July 8, 2010. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/957471/idol-snl-join-glee-with-emmy-nominations>.

²⁶⁷ Courtney Smith, "How Composing for TV is Paying Rents and Hurting Bands," *Pitchfork*, November 5, 2015. <http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/930-how-composing-for-tv-is-paying-rents-and-hurting-bands/>.

a professional situation that required musicians “to change up their game a bit” by diversifying how they would ingratiate themselves into television work.²⁶⁸ However, many of the same issues that Mothersbaugh brought up in his recollections of *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse* still persisted in contemporary productions. Composers still had to produce a tremendous amount of material within a compressed timeframe. *The 100* showrunner Jason Rothenberg claimed that a 42-minute episode of a 22-episode season included up to 36 minutes of score that Phair and her team struggled to produce in the show’s first two seasons until after they had enough cues and incidental music to draw from in their library. Furthermore, the pressure to produce new music within the various chaotic demands of post-production make touring all but impossible for those who rely upon it for financial stability and creative inspiration. In addition, the promise that composing could be a more stable gig for musicians with families may not reflect reality. “There were some days where I didn’t sleep,” Rogue admitted of his time working for HBO.²⁶⁹

Playhouse, The Simpsons, and Twin Peaks demonstrate their composers’ continued influence. In so doing, they also illustrate the various implications of Mothersbaugh’s metaphoric use of conveyor belts to describe composition work for television and film as a process at once oriented toward the future yet forever stuck in the past’s feedback loop and television production’s compressed, hectic work schedules. It speaks to the practices that inform musicians’ labor, the sensibilities they were called upon to offer in their contributions, and these men’s conflicting impulses to disrupt and preserve television history. Or, it explains why Groening hired Oingo Boingo’s lead singer to write for his new show after he said “[i]f you want something retro, I have it. If you want contemporary, I’m the wrong guy.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ John M. Glionna, “A Different Beat,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1999. <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/apr/18/magazine/tm-28420>.

The career longevity that Mothersbaugh, Elfman, and Badalamenti enjoy as composers within the television industry is evident in these programs' enduring commercial interest nearly 30 years after their broadcast debuts and in the accumulation of musicians following their example by pursuing composition work as supplemental income or as an alternative to touring. Yet this chapter argues that new wave artists' contributions as television composers is both a product of industrial synchronization between television and music and an expression of struggle between two industries' asynchronous labor practices. Composing for television is a professional opportunity that is unevenly distributed to a handful of recording artists who are able to keep pace with the television industry's expectations that they generate original music within television's compressed production time frame and be flexible about when to offer their services during the production process. In other words, these composers have to synchronize with the idiosyncratic demands of producing original score for television. Composers have to work fast, log countless hours, and adapt their schedules to the needs of creators, showrunners, editors, and various third parties during pre-production, post-production, and promotional campaigns for various musical paratexts to extend their shows' musical sensibilities toward the ancillary market to capture fan activity. Those opportunities are also disproportionately given to male composers because the male television show creators who enlist their services are fans of their previous work in rock music. Such implicit favoring of male composers as an expression of rock fandom then creates additional barriers to female musicians, many of whom are brought in as collaborators with the composers but struggle to claim creative autonomy for themselves within scoring processes that frequently decentralize and minimize their participation. The implicit privileging of masculinity within rock fandom would also impact musical performances' ability to synchronize with the taste cultures of late-night television, as explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Making Their Broadcast Network Debut: Discovering New Music on *Late Night*

In early 2011, music critics and pop culture bloggers were clamoring over a Los Angeles-based hip-hop collective named Odd Future Wolf Gang Kill Them All, frequently shortened to Odd Future, following select members' network debut on NBC's *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* in late February. Comprised of roughly eleven people, Odd Future's individual members signed separate recording contracts and distribution agreements with XL, Fat Possum, and Def Jam while the group released music from their own label. The collective borrowed this strategy from the Wu-Tang Clan, another hip-hop group who released albums through Loud Records as a group but whose members each signed separate recording contracts with different labels in order to insure that no one entity owned the group's entire creative output.¹

Odd Future garnered comparisons to Wu-Tang for other reasons as well. Some critics noted similarities between groups' austere, cinematic production aesthetic, charismatic MCs, and nihilistic worldview.² One of Odd Future's founding members, MC/producer/video director Tyler, the Creator, (born Tyler Okonma) dropped out of UCLA's film program during his first semester to focus on music and was singled out as the group's de facto leader following the critical success of his 2009 album *Bastard*.³ He drew attention for both for his music as well as his outspoken Twitter presence. Many critics equivocated on whether to defend the artistic merits of Odd Future's deliberately offensive lyrical content, which included surreal and hyperbolic

¹ Frannie Kelley, "The Wu-Tang Clan's 20-Year Plan," *NPR*, April 8, 2013. <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/04/08/176519640/the-wu-tang-clans-20-year-plan>.

² Jonah Weiner, "Best New Wu-Tang: Odd Future," *Rolling Stone* 1129 (2011): 60-61; Chris Martins, "Next Big Things 2011: Odd Future," *Spin*, February 11, 2011. <http://www.spin.com/2011/02/next-big-things-2011-odd-future/>; Sean Fennessey, "The /b/ Boys: Odd Future and the Swag Generation," *Pitchfork*, October 18, 2010. <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/7863-the-b-boys-odd-future-and-the-swag-generation/>.

³ Caroline Ryder, "The Future Is Odd," *Dazed* (December 2011): <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/9152/1/odd-bods/>.

instances of sexual violence against women and gay men. This resulted in a considerable amount of online discourse from critics who grappled with the group's inflammatory speech alongside their perceived formal innovations,⁴ questioned whether they were consciously manipulating notions of black authenticity from the white music critics and hipsters that comprised a substantial portion of its fanbase,⁵ dismissed them as bratty children,⁶ and indicted them for fueling riotous behavior at festivals and against professionals who worked at their shows.⁷

Late Night's Jimmy Fallon was not only aware of Odd Future's volatile self-presentation and critics' ambivalent fascination with it; he wanted to be in the middle of it. The host sought to capitalize upon Odd Future's controversial image by requesting Tyler come on the show. To some extent, *Late Night* got some of the edge that Fallon openly courted. During Tyler and collective member Hodgy Beats' performance of their single "Sandwiches," the stage was strewn with zombies and upside-down crosses. Booking agent Jonathan Cohen and musical director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson had initial misgivings about having them on the show. As Thompson told *Billboard's* Nisha Gopalan, Tyler "was out of his mind: 'Yeah, I want a gnome onstage. And then I want to destroy the gnome.' I just knew, 'Oh, God. I'm going to get blamed for this.'"⁸ However, their profane lyrics were edited for broadcast in accordance with NBC's broadcast standards. According to Odd Future's manager Christian Clancy, Fallon made Tyler feel comfortable enough to revise the song's lyrics "with cheeky affirmations about staying in

⁴ Nitsuh Abebe, "Odd Future, Energy, Inclusion, and Exclusion," *A Grammar*, March 18, 2011. [agrammar.tumblr.com/post/4166624859/odd-future-energy-inclusion-and-exclusion](http://tumblr.com/post/4166624859/odd-future-energy-inclusion-and-exclusion).

⁵ Cord Jefferson, "Odd Future's Odd Fan Base," *The Root*, March 29, 2011. <http://theroot.com/views/odd-future-s-odd-fan-base>.

⁶ Jonah Weiner, "Tyler, the Creator's Cynical Schtick," *Slate*, May 12, 2011. http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/music_box/2011/05/odd_future_same_as_the_odd_past.html.

⁷ Todd Martens, "Odd Future Makes a Quick Exit," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 2011. http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/music_blog/2011/03/sxsw-2011-odd-future-makes-a-quick-exit.html.

⁸ Nisha Gopalan, "Jamming With Jimmy," *Billboard*, February 7, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5900978/jimmy-fallon-cover-story-questlove-jonathan-cohen-tonight>.

school and going to church” when he performed the song before the show’s studio audience.⁹

Fallon, in turn, sought to generate anticipation for the performance with his enthusiastic introduction. He announced that his guests were “turning heads in the hip-hop world” and that “tonight, they’re making their TV debut with us” as he presented a copy of the 12-inch vinyl single to the camera, giving viewers an eyeful of its digital barcode cover image.¹⁰ Tyler and Hodgy Beats were backed by *Late Night*’s house band the Roots and performed not only for the off-camera studio audience and the show’s imagined viewers at home, but for the on-screen crowd assembled behind the stage that stood in for the group’s fan base. Tyler’s performance also gleefully trespassed late night television’s unspoken boundary between seated interview and musical performance when he rushed past Fallon’s desk and got the episode’s two other guests—actors Brandon T. Jackson and Felicia Day—to chant “wolf gang” into his microphone. Clancy compared the act’s experiences on *Late Night* to their treatment on *The Late Show with David Letterman* in April 2013, remembering that Letterman’s staff “were scared to death of Tyler. We had to have 19 meetings about ‘What’s he going to do?’ Then after [he performed], he got screamed at and he stormed out.”¹¹ The next morning Fallon and his show reaped their rewards as various music sites covered the performance with breathless enthusiasm, which reinforced the perception that *Late Night* was a televisual space for discovering exciting new musical talent.¹²

The Odd Future performance was evocative of how *Late Night*, NBC’s lead-out for its long-running talk and variety program *The Tonight Show* since its 1982 premiere with David

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Odd Future,” *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, Episode 395, February 16, 2011.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ryan Schreiber, “Watch: Odd Future’s Insane ‘Fallon’ Performance,” *Pitchfork*, February 17, 2011. <http://pitchfork.com/news/41608-watch-odd-futures-insane-fallon-performance/>; Amos Barshad, “Odd Future Destroys *Jimmy Fallon* With Childlike Enthusiasm and the Travelocity Gnome,” *Vulture*, February 17, 2011. http://www.vulture.com/2011/02/odd_future_destroys_jimmy_fall.html; Amrit Singh, “Odd Future’s Performance on Fallon is a Thing You Absolutely Should Watch,” *Stereogum*, February 17, 2011. <http://www.stereogum.com/642391/odd-futures-performance-on-fallon-is-a-thing-you-absolutely-should-watch/video/>.

Letterman behind the desk, has historically deployed musicians' debut performances over the course of its 30-plus-year history as a way to maintain its identity on NBC as a tastemaker that finds new talent for its viewing audience. Much of this reputation hinges on the hosts' fan identities, the house bands' participation as on-air collaborators, and NBC's desire to represent itself as a springboard for unknown and potentially challenging musical acts, even if the performances that ultimately broadcast from 30 Rockefeller Plaza must comply with FCC regulations. *Late Night* also upholds NBC's self-perception as a central institution of American broadcasting's cultural lineage. The show's musical presentations exist within late-night talk's holdover status from broadcast-era television's evolution from radio and vaudeville. It elaborates upon these traditions within the context of NBC's history by manipulating the show's symbiotic relationship with the network's two major variety franchises, *The Tonight Show* and *Saturday Night Live*. It also demonstrates how each host attempted to differentiate himself from his predecessor by using music as a way to articulate his own comedic sensibility. Clancy's dig at Letterman and the *Late Show* staff's hand-wringing over Tyler's CBS performance points to this aspect of *Late Night*'s legacy. The rapper played up this conflict by storming off immediately after his *Late Show* performance of "Rusty" with collective members Earl Sweatshirt and Domo Genesis, prompting Letterman to awkwardly walk from his desk to the empty main stage and chide, "Come on, don't be like that—now we'll never be able to open the teen center" until the trio reappeared and Tyler half-heartedly shook the host's hand while he texted.¹³ By contrast, Fallon gave the rapper a piggyback ride after his *Late Night* appearance. Fallon, in other words, "got it," both in Clancy's estimation and as a key part of his fannish self-presentation for NBC.

¹³ Carrie Battan and Amy Phillips, "Watch Tyler, the Creator, Earl Sweatshirt, and Domo Genesis Perform 'Rusty,' Takes Selfies on 'Letterman,'" *Pitchfork*, April 5, 2013. <http://pitchfork.com/news/50210-watch-tyler-the-creator-earl-sweatshirt-and-domo-genesis-perform-rusty-take-selfies-on-letterman/>.

Through its hosts, *Late Night* demonstrates the degree to which the show and network “got” its musical guests over its various iterations. They frequently served as gatekeepers between their musical guests and audiences, and their fan performances helped generate interest in these acts and gave them credibility. This carried into the show’s synchronization with important technological shifts in the music industries’ formatting, distribution, and promotional decisions from the multi-channel transition to the post-network era. *Late Night* not only told its audiences what music was cool; it also taught them how to buy it. For example, Letterman’s *Late Night* stewardship witnessed the recording industry’s transition from vinyl to compact disc as its dominant commercial format.¹⁴ During the first half of his run, the host presented his musical guests’ new albums on vinyl before holding up longbox CDs to promote their work during his on-air introductions for the remainder of his time at NBC. Letterman’s successor Conan O’Brien hosted alongside disc storage formats’ commercial peak and the music and film industries’ careful engineering of its market performance.¹⁵ He held up CDs when he introduced musical guests and consulted on the show’s CD and DVD compilations during the late 90s and early 2000s. Finally, Fallon’s tenure coincided with vinyl’s late-2000s’ resurgence.¹⁶ The host presented artists’ work on this format, which gave him a way to present material versions of his guests’ work, even though many of his viewers and staff used social media, mobile apps, and streaming services to access and consume new music. These formats visualized the program’s negotiation between inheritance and reinvention in its attempts to demonstrate its worth and status. Bill Carter claims that late-night musical performances, which usually conclude a broadcast, are not usually factored into a program’s ratings. On late-night talk shows, bands are

¹⁴ “Episode 124: Longbox,” *99% Invisible*, July 22, 2014. <http://99percentinvisible.org/episode/longbox/>.

¹⁵ Tarleton Gillespie, *Wired Shut: Copyright and the Shape of Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Joel Oliphint, “Wax and Wane: The Tough Realities Behind Vinyl’s Comeback,” *Pitchfork*, July 28, 2014. <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/9467-wax-and-wane-the-tough-realities-behind-vinyls-comeback/>.

usually booked “for the audience” because their performances bring “a little energy. But they always put it at the end, which underscores the fact that they don’t think it draws an audience. It makes it easier for them to book breaking music acts they just happen to like.”¹⁷ Thus a key attribute of *Late Night*’s musical performances were that they gave NBC a sense of subcultural cache that had little to do with the standard metrics by which broadcast television traditionally quantifies commercial success, and how that subcultural cache changed across generations.

As a result, appearing on network television was an important rite of passage for some musicians that represent the evolution of their professional status. Yet these performances are arguably asynchronous with late-night programming’s value to network television, as they often go unseen and uncounted in their original context as the last few minutes of a broadcast before the host’s sign-off. Thus Carter’s observation suggests that the musical performances on NBC’s *Late Night* represent a professional negotiation on two fronts. First, they illustrate how musicians try to articulate their value by appearing as guests for promotional purposes and to showcase their talents on television. Second, his claim that late-night programs prioritize artists that reflect the hosts’ and staffs’ personal tastes also suggests that identity plays an important role in *Late Night* hosts’ self-presentation as music fans, how they interact with their guests, and the booking and performance decisions that facilitate those presentations.

To better understand the evolution of the industrial practices surrounding *Late Night*’s booking and performance decisions and their value to NBC, this chapter argues that its value is as a space for musical discovery that coincides with the network’s navigation of the multi-channel transition into the post-network era. It does so by investigating the discursive importance of an artist’s “broadcast network debut” on the program by analyzing the nexus between host,

¹⁷ Ryan Dombal, “Late Night: Independent Music and Late-Night TV,” *Pitchfork*, May 23, 2011. <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/7959-last-night-independent-music-and-late-night-tv/>.

band leader, booking agent, and musical guest over the course of the show's first three iterations with Letterman, O'Brien, and Fallon. *Late Night's* musical performances and booking practices demonstrate how the program serves as a space where emerging musical acts negotiate their value as guests. It considers Fallon's shared lineage with former *Late Night* hosts Letterman and O'Brien; their respective collaborations with musical directors Paul Shaffer, Max Weinberg, and Thompson; and bookers Jim Pitt's and Jonathan Cohen's contributions. In so doing, it argues that musical guests' generic affiliations often synchronize with the hosts' affinities for alternative rock as white male listeners, who then attempt to use the program as a platform for musical eclecticism across generic and racial demarcations to varying results.

Setting the Stage

Late Night relies upon the mediation of liveness. This applies to all aspects of the broadcast, including the host's opening monologue; the desk interviews with the night's two or three guests, who are usually promoting some project and tend to be prioritized by their individual levels of celebrity; the walkover music the house band plays to accompany each guest's procession to the host's desk; any games or interstitial material the host performs; and the musical guest's performance, which is usually his, her, or their newest single. These individual segments all require lively, voiced interaction between the host, guests, house band, and audience in order for them to register as live within the studio where the talk show is taped before it broadcasts after primetime television and usually the local atakinffiliate's nighttime news program, and to television viewers. It is widely understood that this sense of liveness—usually signified by laughter and clapping from the audience, banter between the host and house band, personal stories shared by the celebrities seated on the couch next to the host, and musical performances offered by recording artists—is heavily constructed. Liveness is also a

fundamental part of experiencing broadcast network television. Jane Feuer claims that this quality makes the medium ideological as an institution that is “exploited in order to overcome the contradiction between flow and fragmentation in television practice” by signifying immediacy and authenticity to viewers that also allowed national networks to exercise their centrality and dominance over local affiliates and regional programming.¹⁸ John Caldwell describes liveness as a “myth,” which he claims “is frequently packaged as an artifact” and implicates production and reception of the image.¹⁹ According to Nick Couldry, liveness naturalizes “the idea that, through the media, we achieve a shared attention to the realities that matter for us as a society,” or what he describes as the myth of the mediated center.²⁰ Liveness’s social construction results from three factors: it allows citizens to gain access to something of broader significance, to feel included as part of a larger social group, and to use media as “the privileged means for obtaining that access.”²¹ Couldry refers to such gatherings as “media rituals,” or formalized actions organized “around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with, wider media-related values.”²²

While such assertions about liveness’ ideological underpinnings are essential to understanding television’s power as a medium, industrial sector, and representational strategy, it is important to understand how viewers gather around to watch musical performances specifically. Thus, this analysis of *Late Night*’s performance practices as musicians’ labor must attend to the distinct requirements and limitations placed upon both the television and musical labor responsible for mediating live music for television. Richard Peterson, Murray Forman, and

¹⁸ Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology,” in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches—An Anthology*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1983), 16.

¹⁹ John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 27.

²⁰ Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 99.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

²² *Ibid.*, 29.

Kyle Barnett claim that early broadcast programming relied heavily on musicians in country, jazz, and rock ‘n’ roll, in part because of television’s shared legacy with radio.²³ Forman observes that music’s negotiated representations of liveness resulted from television programs’ technical personnel inventing a visual grammar for performances apart from radio’s exclusively aural register. He claims that even “[i]n television’s earliest stage there was a notable proclivity toward typifying programs according to their sites of production, granting primacy to the contexts of origin and cultural loci rather than their formal characteristics.”²⁴ In particular, television relied upon large studio spaces and multiple-camera set-ups—usually involving two outer cameras positioned on stage left and stage right that captured close-up shots and crosses along with one or two cameras anchored in front of center stage for wide and master shots of the larger ensemble—to allow for multiple shots of one continuous take so that performers could play the song all the way through without interruption, as they would in a concert, and the television production had all of the coverage it needed to visually represent the performance. It also served as a means of orientation by fragmenting recording acts into individual players. This was often accomplished by camera operators and editors framing and cutting between featured players performing instrumental solos, highlighting certain musical passages or other aspects of the larger performance. Musicians also had to develop telegenic performance styles by unlearning “bad habits” like nervous tics, blank stares, or crude gestures that would not be noticeable to a concert audience but could be detected on camera.

²³ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music, Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Murray Forman, *One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).; Kyle Barnett, “Record Men: Talent Scouts in the U.S. Recording Industry, 1920-1935,” in *Suiting Up: Cultures of Management in the Media Industries*, eds. Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 113-141.

²⁴ Forman, *One Night on TV*, 21.

This then informed viewers' reception of more rock-oriented programming later in the decade after the genre replaced big band, jazz, and pop as television music's dominant genre from the 1960s through the 1990s. As Forman said of *Saturday Night Live's* presentation of punk and new wave during its first five years on NBC, the show's "live element constituted a crucial factor of its allure and, as might be expected, some artists performed brilliantly under such conditions and some stumbled noticeably . . . Watching *SNL* was something of a spectator sport, presenting young viewers with a context for discussion about stagecraft and performance aesthetics."²⁵ Building upon Christopher Small's notion of musicking, or individuals' capacities to participate in a musical performance, Forman claims that Small "imposes an arbitrary primacy on the musical event" and risks devaluing "other driving forces that merge within the endeavor" and "may, under specific conditions, actually surpass the musical event."²⁶ To that end he posits "televising" as a term that encompasses all of the significant industrial actors responsible for the performance in front of and behind the camera, because for television producers, individual musical performances serve as "one component of a larger and arguably more complex process."²⁷ According to Philip Auslander, this allows producers and viewers to consider how "the televisual shapes the conditions under which performance is now perceived," particularly in terms of how it modifies various performance style to fit television's production modes.²⁸ Keith Negus claims that these moments are difficult to mediate because producers navigate various editing decisions when framing a song's formal elements, often resulting in performances that minimize recording artists' efforts and their interactions with fellow musicians and the

²⁵ Ibid., 328.

²⁶ Ibid., 181.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Philip Auslander. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 6.

audience.²⁹ Such issues include the volatile nature of mixing for television, an undertaking that simultaneously has to account for how the acoustics of a particular space interact with variables like bodies, room temperature, and amplification, and then how distinct sonic elements like voices and instruments register as audible or inaudible when filtered through a visual medium that is capturing the performance. As a result, Auslander claims that “the home audience does not see the same performance as the studio audience, but sees a performance that never took place.”³⁰ For example, in one *Late Night* profile Wes Orshoski documents Clem Snide’s January 2002 visit.³¹ The group’s day began at 10 a.m., with the band setting up its own equipment at the studio.³² Then they completed a line check—a practice where individual members perform his or her part of a song for the sound technicians to fix equipment problems—by running through their song three times.³³ At sound check, they rehearsed the song three more times with director Liz Plonka and other *Late Night* staffers for audio and video coverage, followed by a listening session of the full mix before a trip to the payroll department, where each member received a \$200-\$300 check for their day’s work.³⁴ Eight hours later, the band taped their segment before a studio audience that presented the illusion of a spontaneous televised performance.³⁵

Such evidence of live musical performance’s constructedness allows scholars to recognize guest appearances as work. Caldwell identifies “industrial reflexivity” as a defining characteristic of the television and film industries during the first decade of the 21st century. Both mediums have become increasingly dependent upon their own mythologies in the stories they

²⁹ Keith Negus, “Musicians on Television: Visible, Audible and Ignored,” *Journal of the Royal Association* 131, no. 2 (2006): 310-330.

³⁰ Auslander. *Liveness*, 22.

³¹ Wes Orshoski, “Late-Night TV Takes Music to Heart: ‘Letterman,’ ‘Leno,’ ‘Conan,’ ‘Kilborn’ Booking Underdog Acts,” *Billboard* 114, no. 7 (2002): 78.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

tell on screen and in trade discourse. Thus television does not “simply produce mass or popular culture” but is itself a cultural expression “involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use” as both an outcome and a constituent “of production culture’s input and output processes.”³⁶ Arguably, then, live musical performance is a form of industrial reflexivity that calls attention to how performers enact work in the four to five minutes they get in the final segment of a late-night talk show. This then raises other questions about the kinds of work enacted on screen and before a live studio audience. Among other things, this allowed scholars to discuss the reconfiguration of musical labor for television, resulting in the circulation of terms like doubling, a form of booking where musicians merge television guest spots with theatrical engagements, radio broadcast appearances, touring, and other forms of professional multitasking. Doubling positions musicians within the dynamics of corporate demands around industry labor, or what scholars like Kay Dickinson refer to as “the *work* of media,”³⁷ which compromise “some of the more robustly maintained distinctions of the work-leisure dichotomy.”³⁸ Such dichotomies inform late-night television reception practices, read alongside audiences’ use of leisure time to buy records and attend concerts as a respite from work,³⁹ as well as musicians’ use of live television performances to fulfill various labor expectations.⁴⁰

Live musical performance is also the product of various intermediaries. A variety of third parties, including booking agents, A&R representatives, deejays, and journalists also shape late-night talk shows’ musicality by serving as gatekeepers for both the television and music industries by accommodating broadcast network mandates and attracting potential consumers to

³⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 2, 34.

³⁷ Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won’t Work Together* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁹ Michael James Roberts, *Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock ‘n’ Roll, the Labor Question, and the Musicians’ Union, 1942-1968*, 2014.

⁴⁰ Dickinson, *Off Key*.

products from both industries. Attributed to Pierre Bourdieu, the term “cultural intermediaries” offers scholars a framework to analyze “workers who come *in-between* creative artists and consumers” and challenge “unidirectional or transmission models of cultural production.”⁴¹ Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews criticize it as “an overly-inclusive, analytically-neutered term” that insufficiently addresses the labor processes “involved in the construction of cultural goods.”⁴² They advocate for its usage to describe their involvement in goods’ framing and marketing, their claims to expertise, and their impact over others’ legitimation of these goods.⁴³ Such distinctions line up with Devon Powers’ use of the term in her analysis of record labels’ marketing, publicity, and promotions departments during the 1960s and 1970s. Powers hones in on the importance of the “company freak,” “an unofficial, usually tongue-in-cheek, and at times pejorative designation for ‘hip’ personnel who worked on rock music within publicity, marketing, or promotions departments.”⁴⁴ Television’s musical performances and booking practices rely extensively on such cultural intermediaries and their connections. In addition, *Late Night*’s hosts often had to translate the work that these intermediaries enact inside record labels for a television audience by performing a degree of hipness and insider knowledge in their awareness of the musical guests and the styles and scenes with which they identified. They also had to manage such self-presentations by simultaneously representing the concerns and interests of both the television and music industries as employees of NBC and as ambassadors to the labels through the degree of enthusiasm, knowledge, and esteem they held for their guests.

⁴¹ Keith Negus, “The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance Between Production and Consumption,” *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2002): 503.

⁴² Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, “Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now? An Introduction to Cultural Intermediaries in Context,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 5 (2012): 552.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 554.

⁴⁴ Devon Powers, “Long-Haired, Freaky People Need to Apply: Rock Music, Cultural Intermediation, and the Rise of the ‘Company Freak,’” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 12 no. 1 (2012): 4.

In addition, *Late Night*'s booking decisions were also bound up in traditional (and contemporized) placement and sales metrics, like *Billboard*, *College Music Journal*, and other industrial metrics that included—among other factors—the measurement of songs' radio airplay. The influence of U.S. college radio—particularly its programming decisions and the ascendance of particular bands that individual stations and their surrounding scenes chose to champion⁴⁵—would become particularly important to the cultivation of *Late Night*'s booking decisions and musical identity throughout the 1980s with David Letterman and especially during the 1990s with Conan O'Brien and music segment producer Jim Pitt. The musical press—in material and non-material iterations—was also an important component to the selection and circulation of musical performances on late-night television in two respects. First, *Late Night* staffs have always relied upon music reporting and criticism as resources to help them vet musical guests for the show.⁴⁶ Second, these publications play a part in creating much of the mythology surrounding the program largely because many of the contributors were also viewers or became music journalists because the show's attention toward breaking new artists oriented their fandom toward the profession. Marketing was an important intermediary for *Late Night* as well. During the 2000s, which witnessed the fallout of individual stations and markets morphed into national formats, large-scale syndication, and multiple indexes of satellite programs in the wake of a series of deregulatory practices and policies culminating in the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Acts, radio's influence did not necessarily disappear. Rather, *Late Night*'s music departments began to think of national, regional, and satellite radio programming as but

⁴⁵ Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁴⁶ Devon Powers, *Writing the Record: The Village Voice and the Birth of Rock Criticism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Mark Deuze, *Media Work* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011).

one set of resources among a host of digital tools that serve as intermediaries.⁴⁷ Thus, Liz Moor's connection between intermediaries and social marketing's ascendance, which draws upon actor-network theory to analyze material and non-human forms of agency that assign value to goods in a digital age,⁴⁸ helps explain why apps like Shazam, social media sites like Twitter, and streaming services like YouTube, which *Billboard* and Nielsen officially added to its streaming data in early 2013, became invaluable to Fallon's staff as tools to aid in booking decisions.⁴⁹

Finally, genre plays an important role in framing *Late Night*'s musical performances. As Forman notes, "the framing of music must be acknowledged, and it is clear that the definition of early televised musical programs also relied on the acknowledgement of musical genres since the music performed on the shows was an important factor of TV's program classification."⁵⁰ Historically *Late Night* has been associated with indie rock, as Letterman's and O'Brien's stewardships reveal. Yet Fallon's stint suggests a more complex interaction with a variety of genres, including ones associated with minority forms of cultural production. According to David Hesmondhalgh, indie rock emphasizes melody over rhythm; a jangly guitar sound; musical amateurism; and literate, confessional songwriting, which are widely interpreted as synonymous with artistic integrity and authenticity.⁵¹ Such generic markers also often presume a connotatively white masculine address in its production and reception, as Ryan Hibbett, Matthew

⁴⁷ Jeremy Morris, *Selling Digital Music, Formatting Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Eric Harvey, "Station to Station: The Past, Present, and Future of Streaming Music," *Pitchfork*, April 16, 2014. <http://pitchfork.com/features/cover-story/reader/streaming>; Tim J. Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Patrick Burkart and Tom McCourt, *Digital Music Wars: Ownership and Control of the Celestial Jukebox* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2006).

⁴⁸ Liz Moor, "Beyond Cultural Intermediaries? A Sociotechnical Perspective on the Market for Social Interventions," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 5 (2012): 563-580.

⁴⁹ "Hot 100 News: Billboard and Nielsen Add YouTube Video Streaming to Platforms," *Billboard*, February 20, 2013. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/1549399/hot-100-news-billboard-and-nielsen-add-youtube-video-streaming-to-platforms>.

⁵⁰ Forman, *One Night on TV*, 124.

⁵¹ David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre," *Cultural Studies* 13 no. 1 (1999): 38.

Bannister, and Tony Grajeda have all observed.⁵² In addition, Bannister identifies the guitar as indie rock's emblematic instrument.⁵³ It was a tool to aid in the genre's rearticulation of "the traditional rock insistence on the superiority of live performance to recordings by insisting on qualities of 'liveness' in recordings" by minimizing technological mediation, which he claims to be the genre's central paradox and connects to its need to characterize "rock cultures as youthful, organic, and spontaneous as opposed to traditional, constructed, and canonical."⁵⁴ Such canons were then reinforced within scenes through racially problematic notions of "purity" that marginalized African-Americans' musical contributions to champion "1960s psychedelia and punk primitivism" and emphasized "pre-sexual or asexual purity" in against metal's hypersexuality and attempted to apply, however unevenly, feminist critiques against rock culture's sexism.⁵⁵ This, in turn, led to indie enforcing "masculine, white, middle-class values."⁵⁶

However, Forman has observed that variety programming has historically presented a conflict in musical and cultural integration through the fixed presence of white male hosts' stilted interactions with black musicians and bandleaders, which is also a hallmark of *Late Night*'s later history in particular.⁵⁷ Live musical performance for television has also been shaped by racial integration and representational politics as well, particularly for black musicians. This experience was not bestowed upon black actors, who were often excluded or subjected to minor stereotypical roles due to racist casting and screenwriting practices. However, black musicians—many of whom were associated with genres like jazz that catered to a white, upper-middle-class

⁵² Matthew Bannister, "'Loaded': Indie Guitar Rock, Canonism, White Masculinities," *Popular Music* 25, no. 1 (2006): 77-95; Ryan Hibbett, "What Is Indie Rock?," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 1 (2005): 55-77; Tony Grajeda, "The 'Feminization' of Rock," in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformation in Popular Music Culture*, eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 233-254.

⁵³ Bannister, "Loaded," 77-78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Forman, *One Night on TV*, 232-271.

clientele—had to appeal to a constructed, hegemonically white and middle-class television audience. They had to set themselves apart from other professionals with their instrumental skill and decorum, as well as ingratiate by “engaging in brief repartee with a show’s host and, occasionally, joining in the scripted dialogue.”⁵⁸ Such expectations came to bear on many of the artists associated with *Late Night*, particularly when the Roots were selected as the house band, as well as some of its musical guests. Thus *Late Night*’s musical performances serve as a mediated space that allows scholars to document the evolution of cultural and industrial beliefs around racial and gender politics and its impact on the music industries’ labor practices and representational strategies. In particular, hip-hop became an important genre for the program during Fallon’s stewardship, a genre Tricia Rose identifies as the interplay between the voice as “an important expressive instrument” alongside “[r]hythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in the bass frequencies, and breaks in pitch and time” to represent black forms of cultural expression within fraught negotiations of citizenship, social justice, and racial authenticity.⁵⁹ Finally, Keith Negus observes that musicians associated within hip-hop are “often denied direct access, offered licensing deals, lower budgets, poorer contracts, or simply cut from the roster when there is a financial crisis,” resulting in its practitioners’ ability “to generate alternative resources, and through these the genre has continually reinvented and redefined itself in those spaces and places designated (for want of terminology rather than as a transparent description of a reality) as ‘underground,’”⁶⁰ tactics the Roots deployed to secure their place in late-night television’s constellation system. It is amid this tension between the hosts’ orientation toward genres like indie and alternative rock as white male

⁵⁸ Ibid., 233.

⁵⁹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 66-67.

⁶⁰ Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 102.

listeners and the degrees to which genres like hip-hop and R&B, which are often associated with performers of color and minority-based cultural traditions, that *Late Night* attempted to frame itself as a site of musical discovery for NBC, beginning with Letterman as its host.

Your Friends All Watched

Late Night built its reputation as a springboard for bold, new music on the backs of many pioneering broadcast and syndicated variety programs in the United States and Great Britain, including *American Bandstand*, *Hullabaloo*, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, *Soul Train*, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and *The Midnight Special*, which aired on Fridays after *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* from 1973 to 1981.⁶¹ However, its immediate predecessor was *The Tomorrow Show*. Reportedly developed as a way for NBC to generate more revenue following the 1971 Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act, which banned tobacco advertising on television,⁶² the talk show debuted on October 15, 1973, with *The Tonight Show* as its lead-in. Produced by future Fox News CEO and alleged serial sexual harasser Roger Ailes,⁶³ *The Tomorrow Show* was hosted by Tom Snyder, a chain-smoking radio and television personality who made his name as a news anchor on Los Angeles' NBC affiliate,⁶⁴ and later anchored several news shows and celebrity specials for the network.⁶⁵ *The Tomorrow Show* created a forum for recording artists, which helped NBC reinvent its network identity through its associations with rock history during the 1970s and early 80s. For example, when John Lennon was murdered in December 1980, the network rebroadcast the musician's 1975 interview with

⁶¹ Nelson George, *The Hippest Trip in America: Soul Train and the Evolution of Culture & Style* (New York: William Morrow, 2014); Norma J. Coates, "It's a Man's, Man's World: Television and the Masculinization of Rock Discourse and Culture" (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002); Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁶² "Tom Snyder," *Later*, May 18, 1994. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF5lfk5-QxU>.

⁶³ Charles Aaron, "1977: The Year Punk Exploded," *Spin*, September 20, 2007. <http://www.spin.com/2007/09/1977-year-punk-exploded/>

⁶⁴ Andy Friendly, "Recalling Snyder as Fearless, Peerless Friend," *Television Week* 26, no. 31 (2007): 10.

⁶⁵ Mike Drew, "Tom Snyder's Yesterdays ... and Tomorrows," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 25, 1993, 3.

Snyder as tribute.⁶⁶ *The Tomorrow Show* ran until 1981, and thus during the arc of punk's notoriety in the United States and Great Britain during the second half of the 1970s. The show took advantage of punk's momentum by featuring several of its associates, primarily to fill up air time at 1 a.m. This aspect of the show's legacy was recognized commercially when Shout! Factory released a DVD compilation in 2006 of eight episodes from 1977 to 1981 that featured musical guests associated with punk and new wave, including Patti Smith, The Ramones, and Iggy Pop, as well as intermediaries like critics, promoters, and band managers.⁶⁷

Snyder did not personally identify with punk as a middle-aged white man and veteran newscaster. He sometimes expressed bewilderment and confusion toward scenesters' crude antics, harsh look, and anti-establishment stance, and occasionally got into disagreements with musical guests that demonstrated live television's ability to cause discomfort. During an interview in one 1980 episode, he got into a tense argument with Public Image Limited frontman John Lydon and guitarist Keith Levene.⁶⁸ But *Tomorrow Show* appearances allowed some of these bands to cultivate or develop an audience early in their careers. In Costello's case, *The Tomorrow Show* served as a promotional outlet on U.S. national television for his band the Attractions after they were banned from *Saturday Night Live* in 1977 after an impromptu performance of anti-censorship anthem "Radio, Radio."⁶⁹ *The Tomorrow Show* was frequently associated with NBC's premiere late-night sketch comedy show. Dan Aykroyd impersonated Snyder in a recurring sketch that made fun of the host's square demeanor and the show's low

⁶⁶ "Back Story," *Broadcasting & Cable* 130, no. 50 (2000): 71.

⁶⁷ Gillian G. Gaar, "The Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder: John, Paul, George, Tom & Ringo," *Goldmine* 34, no. 12 (2008): 50; Ed Grant, "The Tomorrow Show: Tom Snyder's Electric Kool-Aid Talk Show," *Video Business* 10, no. 37 (2006): 10; Barry Walters, "The Tomorrow Show with Tom Snyder: Punk and New Wave," *Rolling Stone* 993 (2006): 70.

⁶⁸ "The Tomorrow Show With Tom Snyder: Punk & New Wave," *Philadelphia Weekly*, February 1, 2006, 37.

⁶⁹ "Elvis Costello," *The Tomorrow Show*, February 3, 1981.

ratings.⁷⁰ The two programs would share multiple musical guests, and *The Tomorrow Show* scooped many artists who had yet to appear on national television, including “Weird” Al Yankovic, The Jam, and Wendy O. Williams and the Plasmatics.

Finally, *The Tomorrow Show* served as a sounding board for debates within the music industries about punk’s ideological directives. Much of this interest followed from an October 1977 episode about punk that included a forum with concert and festival promoter Bill Graham, *Los Angeles Times*’ critic Robert Hilburn, Runaways’ manager Kim Fowley, and musicians Joan Jett and Paul Weller to discuss punk’s merits and values.⁷¹ Among the many items debated were punk’s semiotic flirtations with Fascist imagery, which Graham objected to as a Holocaust escapee,⁷² as well as its indebtedness to earlier musical forms, its vitality as a form of creative expression within youth culture, and the Runaways’ particular struggles with professional legitimation because of their young, all-female line-up. Snyder also framed punk as a byproduct of disenfranchisement, particularly within the class-conscious and economically depressed United Kingdom, even though only Weller and Jett recognized those aspects of punk as integral to its livelihood while the rest dismissed it as a fad. This was a particularly telling stance on Fowley’s part given his cruel mistreatment of the Runaways, including his sexual assault of bassist Jackie Fuchs, whose recent departure Jett alludes to at the beginning of her segment.⁷³ Yet Snyder’s willingness to engage these musicians established late-night television as a space for up-and-coming recording artists, upon which NBC would capitalize for *Late Night*.

⁷⁰ Don Mills, “Talk Show Host Known for his Casual Style,” *National Post*, July 31, 2007, AL7.

⁷¹ *The Tomorrow Show*, October 11, 1977.

⁷² Bruce Lambert, “Bill Graham, Rock Impresario, Dies at 60 in Crash,” October 27, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/27/us/bill-graham-rock-impresario-dies-at-60-in-crash.html>.

⁷³ Jason Cherkis, “The Lost Girls,” *Huffington Post*, July 9, 2015. <http://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/the-lost-girls/>.

In 1980, *Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson resolved a legal battle with NBC over various terms in his contract like the show's run time, which Carson wanted trimmed to an hour. *The Tomorrow Show* would move up to the 12:30 timeslot, but Snyder did not like that this would expand episodes to ninety minutes and quit, irrevocably damaging his relationship with NBC.⁷⁴ The network scrambled to install Rona Barrett as the show's host, to Snyder's ire,⁷⁵ and scaling back on its musical segments⁷⁶ for its final season before cancelling it in December 1981. NBC's executives were also interested in developing a vehicle for stand-up comedian and frequent *Tonight Show* guest David Letterman following the cancellation of his short-lived daytime talk show for the network.⁷⁷ By February 1982, *Late Night* was on the air.⁷⁸

The David Letterman Show made certain compromises in tone and sensibility for its mid-morning timeslot, assumedly to appeal to the perceived tastes of the housewives NBC thought were watching the program that the host did not want to replicate for his foray into late-night programming. In Studio 6A, *Late Night* became the testing ground for Letterman's deadpan, barbed impression of white male broadcasters' performative wholesomeness, largely without consequence.⁷⁹ Even though *Late Night* never enjoyed the same ratings as its lead-in, it did not need to. There was no original programming against which NBC competed on weeknights at 12:30, which Letterman believed enabled him to find his own comedic voice.⁸⁰ It was on *Late Night* that Letterman developed recurring segments like the Top Ten List, Stupid Pet Tricks, and

⁷⁴ "NBC Speeds Timetable for Snyder Axing," *Variety* 305, no. 6 (1981): 35, 62.

⁷⁵ John J. O'Connor, "Rona Barrett's Downhill Ride," *New York Times*, December 20, 1981. <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/20/arts/tv-view-rona-barrett-s-downhill-ride.html>

⁷⁶ "NBC and Snyder at the Breaking Point," *Variety* 304, no. 11 (1981): 313.

⁷⁷ Henry Bushkin and Andy Lewis, "How Johnny Carson Nearly Quit 'Tonight' and Scored TV's Richest Deal Ever," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 9, 2013. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-johnny-carson-quit-tonight-644508>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Bill Carter, *The Late Shift: Letterman, Leno, and the Network Battle for the Night* (New York: Hachette Books, 1995).

⁸⁰ Richard Zoglin, "He's No Johnny Carson," *Time* 133, no. 6 (1989): 66-70.

Stupid Human Tricks, as well as experimented with stunts like dropping himself into a pool of water while wearing a suit made of Alka-Seltzer tablets, often with an air of wry bemusement.⁸¹ He also established important connections with guests like Pee-Wee Herman and underground comic book figure Harvey Pekar, adversarial relationships with singer Cher and talk show host Oprah, and creative partnerships with Larry “Bud” Melman and Chris Elliott.⁸²

Late Night also established the holiday tradition of singer Darlene Love serenading the host with “Christmas (Baby Please Come Home).”⁸³ The recurring segment began in 1986 after band leader Paul Shaffer approached Love after their set at the Bottom Line.⁸⁴ Despite Letterman’s aversion to rock’s seasonal novelty songs, the host told Shaffer “[y]ou know that song that girl sings? That Christmas song? That’s the greatest Christmas song I’ve ever heard. We need to get her on the show.”⁸⁵ Once a member of the Crystals, Love was now a maid and for-hire back-up singer and accepted the invitation.⁸⁶ Thus rock was a way for Letterman to differentiate himself from other late-night hosts, including his mentor Johnny Carson, who would not begin booking more contemporary performers until the mid-1980s after *Late Night* had been on the air for a few years.⁸⁷ Though Letterman felt indebted to Carson for offering him national exposure as a stand-up comedian, he knew that *The Tonight Show* was not on the cutting edge in its music booking decisions. For example, on the same night that *The Tomorrow Show* held its summit on punk with Paul Weller and Joan Jett, Dixieland clarinetist Pete Fountain played *The*

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Carter, *The Late Shift*.

⁸³ Matthew Lynch, “An Oral History of Darlene Love’s Legendary Letterman Christmas Performances,” *Vanity Fair*, December 19, 2014. <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/12/darlene-love-last-letterman-christmas>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Lynch, “An Oral History of Darlene Love’s Legendary Letterman Christmas Performances.”

⁸⁶ *20 Feet From Stardom* (New York: RADiUS-TWC, 2013).

⁸⁷ James Kaplan, “Stay Up Late,” *New Yorker* 64, no. 48 (1989): 53; Geoff Mayfield, “Music Fit on Carson Couch,” *Billboard* 117, no. 6 (2005): 49.

Tonight Show.⁸⁸ Carson saw *The Tonight Show* as a platform for discovering comedic talent, including Letterman and future *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno, but was largely indifferent to new music at the time.⁸⁹ Several of Carson's musical guests were contemporaries of *Tonight Show* band leader Doc Severinsen.⁹⁰ That meant that they were associated with genres like easy listening, lounge music, and lite jazz, which were considered outré by the early 1980s. Carson also tended to bring back song-and-dance performers like Liberace, Lola Falana, Charo, Ethel Merman, and Wayne Newton several times a year. Though Carson's team recognized generic and ethnic diversity with guests like Tejano guitarist Freddy Fender and black pop acts like Roberta Flack and Della Reese, *The Tonight Show*'s musical tastes were out of step with emerging rock subgenres like punk, new wave, and indie rock. They also did not speak to Letterman as a Baby Boomer who came of age during rock music's ascent as a mass medium.

But Letterman was interested in following the music booking practices of a different late-night NBC show. Though *Saturday Night Live* was struggling to stay on the air at the time due to low ratings and in-fighting between show and network personnel following executive producer Lorne Michaels' departure in 1980, the program often showcased interesting new musical talent in its first five years. In 1975, the program's original cast and music department were particularly interested in punk as fixtures at New York City nightclubs like CBGB's and Max's Kansas City and brought on the Talking Heads and Blondie.⁹¹ Such booking decisions solidified the young

⁸⁸ "Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson: Pat Boone, Steve Landesberg, Pete Fountain, Merie Earle, October 11, 1977," *Paley Center for Media*, <https://www.paleycenter.org/collection/item/?q=tonight+show+starring+johnny+carson&f=title&c=tv&advanced=1&p=29&item=B:84441>.

⁸⁹ Dave Izkoff, "Now Quipping Online," *New York Times*, August 11, 2010. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A06EFD61739F932A2575BC0A9669D8B63>

⁹⁰ John McDonough, "When Johnny Goes, So Goes Last of TV Big Bands," *Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 1992, A22; Walter Crockett, "Doc Severinsen Still Hitting the High Notes," *Telegram & Gazette*, July 28, 1989, A11; Mary Shaughnessy, "The Tonight Show Band with Doc Severinsen," *People* 26 (1986): 28-29; Zan Stewart, "Doc Severinsen: Tonight's the Night," *Down Beat* 52 (1985): 16-18.

⁹¹ Susan Murray, "Live from New York!," in *Saturday Night Live and American TV*, eds. Nick Marx, Matt Sienkiewicz, and Ron Becker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013): 40-53.

sketch program's synonymy with a dangerous city and its exciting night life. In addition, a variety of other musical acts associated with new wave would appear on the program, including Devo, the B-52s, Gary Newman, and the Specials. The program strengthened its rock credentials by booking veteran rock acts like Paul Simon, the Band, and David Bowie, and anticipated the meteoric rise of then-unknowns like Prince.⁹² Under Letterman, *Late Night* borrowed extensively from *Saturday Night Live*'s booking decisions. By the end of 1982, it booked on Costello and Devo, whose members met future collaborator Paul Reubens while milling about Studio 8A,⁹³ and invited Talking Heads' frontman David Byrne and the Band's drummer Levon Helm.

Hiring Shaffer as *Late Night*'s band leader helped Letterman solidify *Late Night*'s connection to *SNL* and its rock-oriented booking and performance practices. Born in Toronto, Shaffer cut his teeth working for composer Stephen Schwartz before serving as a member of *Saturday Night Live*'s house band during its first five years.⁹⁴ Shaffer caught Letterman's attention during his job interview when he said that he saw the program's house band as a lounge act, which he named the World's Most Dangerous Band in an effort to appeal to emerging hipster nostalgia at the time for cool jazz and exotica figures like Dave Brubeck and Martin Denny.⁹⁵ The band leader ingratiated himself into *Late Night* in a variety of ways, such as playing a substantial role in NBC's 1987 mandate that all of show's musical guests had to perform with the house band instead of using their own rhythm sections.⁹⁶ But the program still needed to demonstrate that it had its ear to the ground regarding interesting new music. This required Letterman and Shaffer to rely on the tastes of other members of the music department,

⁹² *Saturday Night Live: 25 Years of Music, Performances, and Sketches* (New York: NBC Studios, 2003).

⁹³ David Fear, "Pee-Wee Herman Returns," *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2014. <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/features/paul-reubens-on-pee-wees-playhouse-20141020>.

⁹⁴ Paul Shaffer, *We'll Be Here for the Rest of Our Lives: A Swingin' Showbiz Saga* (New York: Anchor, 2010).

⁹⁵ James Kaplan, "Stay Up Late," *The New Yorker* 64, no. 48 (1989): 53.

⁹⁶ Bob Mehr, *Trouble Boys: The History of the Replacements* (Boston: Da Capo, 2016), 259.

as well as *Late Night*'s young writing staff. But as musical director, Shaffer had some influence over the program's music booking decisions, particularly because of his own connections.⁹⁷ First, he had an in with *Saturday Night Live*'s band and music department, which included notable figures like producer Hal Willner and, later, music booker Michele Galfas, who Lorne Michaels hired after NBC cancelled his short-lived sketch program, *The New Show*, and brought him back to try and revive *SNL* in 1985.⁹⁸ Shaffer also had other musical contacts as a recording artist and session musician.⁹⁹ Finally, his responsibilities as the producer and musical director of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony put him in touch with many top-tier rock acts and gave him access to Foundation members like Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun, *Rolling Stone* editor and publisher Jann S. Wenner, entertainment lawyer Allen Grubman, and Sire Records' executive (and later Warner Bros. Records' vice president) Seymour Stein.¹⁰⁰

In addition to poaching many musical guests from *Saturday Night Live*, Letterman demonstrated his own fondness for introspective rock and alt-country singer-songwriters like Tom Waits, Maureen O'Sullivan, Joe Jackson, Emmylou Harris, Steve Earle, Suzanne Vega, k.d. lang, Warren Zevon, and Pretenders' leader Chrissie Hynde, some of whom he would bring back multiple times and even interviewed behind his desk.¹⁰¹ But one band in particular was enormously valuable for *Late Night*'s early attempts to distinguish itself from *SNL* by

⁹⁷ Debby Miller, "Paul Shaffer: David Letterman's Marvelous Maestro," *Rolling Stone* 429 (1984): 30-32; Kaplan, "Stay Up Late," 36-55.

⁹⁸ Bob Mehr, *Trouble Boys*, 203.

⁹⁹ Shaffer, *We'll Be Here for the Rest of Our Lives*.

¹⁰⁰ Rob Tannenbaum, "Jann Wenner Answers Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 'Too Male, Too White, Too Rich' Critics," *Billboard*, April 20, 2010. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6531175/inside-rock-roll-hall-fame-induction-process-secrets-jann-wenner>; Michael Norman, "Cleveland to Host 2009 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony," *Cleveland.com*, December 19, 2007. http://www.cleveland.com/music/index.ssf/2007/12/cleveland_to_host_2009_rock_an.html; "HBO Offers Live Video on the Internet From the Concert for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame," *PR Newswire* (1995): 816.

¹⁰¹ Maura Johnston, "David Letterman was Late Night's Music Champion," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/may/20/david-letterman-best-musical-guests>.

discovering new musical talent. The Athens-based quartet ended the decade on Warner's roster as part of the label's move to groom regional acts with ardent followings within college radio and the music press in order to avoid another recession like the one that crippled the majors at the dawn of the 80s.¹⁰² *Late Night* was useful for such strategizing as a promotional vehicle that specifically targeted a smaller, niche audience—many of whom were assumed to be tuning into their university station and catching up with their favorite rock critic's musings—who were up watching Letterman. Or, as R.E.M. bassist Mike Mills later put it, "I was always a big fan of Dave's so we were really happy to be on his show. You knew that your friends all watched that show. We didn't know who else did, but we knew our friends did, so it was very exciting."¹⁰³

R.E.M. made their first appearance on *Late Night* in October 6, 1983 to promote their debut album, *Murmur*, which I.R.S. Records released in April to considerable critical acclaim for their melodic yet lyrically opaque guitar-based rock music and lead singer Michael Stipe's inert stage presence. Letterman used their reputation to frame his introduction of the band. Holding a vinyl copy of the album, featuring Sandra Lee Phipps' cover photo of a field taken over by kudzu in a nod to the band's Georgian roots, the host looked directly at the camera and proclaimed, "I mentioned earlier the *Los Angeles Times* just named this album one of the five best released so far in 1983. It's called *Murmur*, it's by a group of gentlemen in Athens, Georgia called R.E.M. and we're happy to have them making their national television debut with us tonight. Please welcome, R.E.M."¹⁰⁴ As Mills recalled, the staff "liked to find [new acts] before anybody else did—even though at the time there was no late-night competition. It was still a coup for them to

¹⁰² Mehr, *Trouble Boys*, 168-173.

¹⁰³ David Daley, "R.E.M.'s Mike Mills Remembers Band's David Letterman Appearances, How He Broke News of His Retirement," *Salon*, May 20, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2015/05/20/exclusive_r_e_m_s_mike_mills_remembers_bands_david_letterman_appearances_how_he_broke_the_news_of_his_retirement/.

¹⁰⁴ "R.E.M.," *Late Night with David Letterman*, Episode 116, October 6, 1983.

get hot bands on there first.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, Letterman’s introduction reflected his desire to use rock music to differentiate *Late Night* from *The Tonight Show* and scoop *SNL* on booking the band.

R.E.M. then launched into a performance of “Radio Free Europe,” *Murmur*’s lead single. Whether unintentional or deeply calculated, lead singer Michael Stipe’s mumbled vocal delivery and downturned gaze eschewed the commercial norms of live musical performance on broadcast television. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of the band, whose energetic stage presentation carried the song’s elliptical verses to its anthemic chorus and whose contributions to the overall sound—specifically Peter Buck’s guitar melody, bassist Mike Mills’ harmonies, and Bill Berry’s pounding drums—registered much higher in the mix than Stipe’s comparatively quiet singing. Stipe’s beguiling presence also shaped the band’s between-song interview with Letterman. Usually, a vocalist is expected to stand in front of the band as its ambassador and field myth-making questions about songwriting, artistic influences, and tour and studio war stories when promoting their work. R.E.M., and by association *Late Night*, signified its alternative status by doing away with the rock band’s traditional division of labor. Rather than banter with Letterman, Stipe sat quietly behind Buck and let R.E.M.’s sidemen field the host’s questions.

Apart from Stipe’s silence, Letterman’s interaction with the band was notable for other reasons. Though Letterman would often entertain the formality of shaking hands with musical guests after they performed, his interest in individual performers varied widely. He would often express his disinterest or ignorance in a band through awkward humor. If he liked an act, he would rarely interview them from the stage, opting instead to have members sit with him by his desk before or after a song if he had time left in the broadcast.¹⁰⁶ As an extension of Snyder’s

¹⁰⁵ Daley, “R.E.M.’s Mike Mills Remembers Band’s David Letterman Appearances, How He Broke News of His Retirement.”

¹⁰⁶ Carter, *The Late Shift*.

studied civility, Letterman's decision to ingratiate himself within R.E.M.'s stage set-up powerfully visualized his status not only as a professional broadcaster but as a fan, even if his self-presentation as a talk show host—albeit one who appears to be encasing the descriptors for his profession in scare quotes—was incongruous when positioned alongside amplifiers and mic stands. Finally, Letterman gave R.E.M. an opportunity to contextualize their music by asking them questions about their home base, a college town with a thriving art and queer scenes due to its relatively low cost of living and its proximity to the University of Georgia.¹⁰⁷

Letterman: You're from Athens, Georgia? Now it's true that there are new bands coming out of Athens, Georgia, right?

Buck: Quite a few, yeah.

Letterman: Now, why would that be? Why all of a sudden Athens, Georgia? Not that it isn't a fine community? Or is it—

Mills: [It's a] fine college town.

Letterman: Fine college town. Well, is there an explanation behind that?

Buck: Yeah, there's a lack of anything else to do there.

Letterman: No there's not. Who else is from there?

Mills: Herschel Walker.

Letterman: Herschel Walker, we have his album. We'll be listening to that a little later. The B-52s—

Buck: Pylon, Tractor, Method Actors—

Letterman: But is there a reason for that or—

Buck: No, it's a college town. A lot of kids try to waste time creatively I guess.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2005), 383-386; Janet Maslin, "'Athens, GA.,' on Rock Bands," *New York Times*, May 29, 1987. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/29/movies/athens-ga-on-rock-bands.html>.

¹⁰⁸ "R.E.M.," *Late Night with David Letterman*.

In addition to getting a relatively in-depth (though characteristically awkward) interview with Letterman to demonstrate their value and esteem on the show, R.E.M. also gave *Late Night* an exclusive. They did a two-song set that night, a relatively rare distinction for any late-night variety show on the network at the time except for *SNL*, and previewed a song so new it had yet to be named.¹⁰⁹ The band would later entitle it “So. Central Rain,” and select it as the lead single for their next album, *Reckoning*, which was highly praised by rock critics the following year and gave the band a wider audience.¹¹⁰ By the end of the 1980s, R.E.M. became one of the highest-selling and critically renowned rock bands of their generation, credentials they largely attributed to Letterman’s early acceptance of the group and their association with NBC’s “hip” late-night program.¹¹¹ “That changed things,” said Jim Pitt, who caught the broadcast and singled out the performance as the chief motivating factor for his decision to pursue an internship at *Saturday Night Live*.¹¹² “Their booking policy became cool, so we took what they did and went a little further left of center when we started” Pitt claimed, noting that it was easier “to try to book stuff you wouldn’t see on other shows”¹¹³ by targeting lesser-known bands, which freed *Late Night* from having to deal with rejection from bigger acts that were unwilling to appear on the show. R.E.M.’s relationship with Letterman continued to develop over the years as well. The host gave

¹⁰⁹ Daley, “R.E.M.’s Mike Mills Remembers Band’s David Letterman Appearances, How He Broke News of His Retirement.”

¹¹⁰ David Fricke, “It’s Alive!: American Dream,” *Melody Maker* 59, no. 26 (1984): 20; Don Snowden, “R.E.M. Faces Its Time of Reckoning,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1984, 55; Ian Pye, “Mythical Americans,” *Melody Maker* 59, no. 15 (1984): 27.

¹¹¹ Mike Tierney, “Mike Mills: A Rock Star of Fantasy Sports,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/sports/mike-mills-a-rock-star-of-fantasy-sports.html?pagewanted=all>; David Buckley, *R.E.M.: Fiction: An Alternative Biography* (New York: Virgin, 2002); Anthony DeCurtis, “R.E.M.: Monster Madness,” *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 1994, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/monster-madness-19941020>. Bill Wyman, “How R.E.M. Woke Up Rock ‘N’ Roll in the ‘80s,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1989. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-12-05/features/8903150461_1_rem-record-store-band; Steve Pond, “R.E.M. in the Real World,” *Rolling Stone*, December 3, 1987, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/r-e-m-in-the-real-world-rolling-stones-1987-cover-story-20110921>.

¹¹² Dombal, “Late Night.”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

the band an open invitation to perform on his show as both a gesture of fandom and as a show of gratitude for raising *Late Night*'s visibility in its early years and the band returned the favor several times before they disbanded in 2011.¹¹⁴ Finally, Mills actually broke the news of Letterman's retirement from broadcast television in April 2014, using Twitter to make the announcement and reflect on how much the band's *Late Night* debut meant to him.¹¹⁵

Despite *Late Night*'s "cool" booking policy, Letterman and Shaffer still demonstrated cultural insensitivity toward some of the musical guests that grabbed the program's spotlight. This was evocative of how Shaffer described his original vision for the World's Most Dangerous Band, who accompanied all of *Late Night*'s musical guests from 1987 to 1993, which he based on his memory of the house act at "a topless bar on Yonge Street, in Toronto, called the Zanzibar."¹¹⁶ This statement revealed the future musical director's tacit assumptions about women's ornamental function in popular music. Such cultural insensitivity extended into Shaffer's racist assumptions about black authenticity when he marveled that the Zanzibar, "was a very hip jam scene. There weren't too many black people in Toronto at that time, but all of them, I was *sure*, were at this thing in the afternoon. Sitting in with this band, oblivious of the topless chicks."¹¹⁷ Letterman indulged similar behavior when interacting with some of *Late Night*'s musical guests. Before introducing A Tribe Called Quest, who performed "Check the Rhime" from their second album *The Low-End Theory* on their broadcast debut performance with *Late Night* in March 1992, Letterman addressed the Afrocentric hip-hop group by nervously declaring himself "the king of rappers, you know"¹¹⁸ before fumbling through a half-hearted introduction.

¹¹⁴ Johnston, "David Letterman was *Late Night*'s Music Champion."

¹¹⁵ Chris Payne, "David Letterman's Retirement Scooped By R.E.M. Alum Mike Mills," *Billboard*, April 3, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6039423/david-lettermans-retirement-scooped-by-rem-alum-mike-mills>.

¹¹⁶ Kaplan, "Stay Up Late," 53.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹¹⁸ "A Tribe Called Quest," *Late Night with David Letterman*, Episode 1563, March 25, 1992.

The host was also clueless about how to react to displays of feminine anger from female alternative rock musicians who were contemporaries of riot grrrl, an explicitly feminist rock movement that originated in the Pacific Northwest at the turn of the 90s that played with punk and childhood signifiers like hair dye and babydoll dresses to critique women's exclusion from subcultural practices and their infantilization within the music industries.¹¹⁹ After witnessing Los Angeles punk band L7 make their broadcast network debut on *Late Night* in 1992 with a raucous performance of "Pretend We're Dead," the host and band leader weighed in on its gender-appropriateness while the group was still on stage but off-camera by reducing a group of adult female musicians to a delinquent girl gang to the audience's vocal amusement:

Letterman: L7, Paul. What do you think?

Shaffer: Swingin' band.

Letterman: I just hope—I hope the girls aren't starting to run around with the wrong crowd. I pray to god they're not neglecting their studies because they damaged several hundred-thousand dollars' worth of equipment over there and almost ruined our new oil painting!

Shaffer: Bad band—

Letterman: I want you to have a talk with the girls, Paul.

Shaffer: I will—

Letterman: Because, hey, if there's any more of this we'll have to ground them.

Shaffer: I happen to know they're very serious about their studies and actually they have a tutor on the road with them.

Letterman: Ahhh, I wouldn't mind a little of that myself.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

¹²⁰ "L7," *Late Night with David Letterman*, Episode 1653, September 8, 1992.

Thus while *Late Night* launched a number of musical careers in its first decade with Letterman, its value as a site of musical discovery for NBC was still defined by white men's musical tastes. This reflected some of the program's shortcomings regarding the host's attitudes toward racial and gender difference and generic eclecticism that threatened to decentralize his authority as a cultural arbiter through the program's booking and performance practices. In these instances, Letterman's inability to "get it" potentially discredited and shut down certain performers' ability to equally participate in *Late Night's* representation of musical discovery. It also suggested that the host's age disallowed him from being old enough to "get it," and that, like Carson before him, Letterman's musical tastes were becoming increasingly irrelevant for *Late Night's* audience. Though in many ways Letterman's successor was a student of his comedy, Conan O'Brien's associations with Generation X and alternative rock helped usher *Late Night* and NBC into the post-network era, albeit with some complications.

Planting Seeds for Future Stars

On September 14, 1993, Conan O'Brien introduced the first music act to appear on *Late Night* with him as host. Holding up a CD copy of *Pablo Honey*, O'Brien proclaimed in a dry, nasal tone that "[m]y next guests have taken self-loathing and raised it to an art form. We gave them several images to play in front of and they chose really slow cars. So please welcome our very first musical guests and, I really like these guys, Radiohead."¹²¹ The band then launched into "Creep," the album's lead single. The introduction encapsulated O'Brien's comedic self-awareness, as well as his taste for alternative rock, a nebulous categorical term that grew from a confluence of the previous decade's musical formations, including British post-punk and American indie rock. Critic Michael Azerrad argued that alternative rock was less a genre than a

¹²¹ "Radiohead," *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, Season 1, Episode 2, September 14, 1993.

marketing strategy and flagged R.E.M.'s 1988 Warner Bros. signing and the commercial success of their major-label debut *Green* as the beginning of an “explosion” aided by extensive college radio promotion and reformatting, indie label absorption by the majors, and the installation of various indie-branded subsidiaries.¹²² It was also associated with Generation X, a term popularized by author Douglas Coupland’s book about a friend group’s detachment from their Southern Californian surroundings¹²³ that described an air of ironic detachment and cynicism associated with young people born a generation after the post-war baby boom.¹²⁴ It also became a marketing tool which *Late Night*’s new executive producer Lorne Michaels wielded by hiring a 30-year-old comedy writer with hopes of injecting the program with renewed cultural relevance. Michaels observed that the original *Late Night* host and his *Tonight Show* rival Jay Leno were “essentially [in] my generation—they were boomers. I thought the smart move was to drop down a generation, but if you’re at 30 or 28, there’s no one with any experience.”¹²⁵ Thus Michaels chose O’Brien, who cut his teeth as a staff writer for *SNL* and *The Simpsons*. This spoke to the production’s decision to project looped images from the public domain behind the main stage to give Radiohead’s performance a post-modern, lo-fi aesthetic. It also pointed toward why O’Brien underlined the English rock band’s morose performance style and identified with it.

As *Late Night*’s new host, O’Brien frequently associated himself with alternative rock by making room for them on the Studio 4A main stage and inviting them over to chat on the couch as he did with early guests like Lush. These were often ramshackle affairs that demonstrated O’Brien’s inexperience as an interviewer. Yet they managed to suggest that the host “got” his

¹²² Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes From the American Indie Underground 1981-1991* (New York: Little, Brown and Company), 494-495.

¹²³ Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991).

¹²⁴ David M. Gross and Sophronia Scott, “Living: Proceed With Caution,” *Time*, July 16, 1990. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,970634-1,00.html>.

¹²⁵ Lane Brown, “In Conversation: Lorne Michaels,” *Vulture*, February 2, 2014. <http://www.vulture.com/2014/01/lorne-michaels-on-tonight-show-snl.html>.

musical guests, like when he let Breeders' bassist Josephine Wiggs suck his neck after front woman Kim Deal revealed that the band got drunk the night before their *Late Night* appearance, their first on national television, and gave each other hickeys.¹²⁶ *Saturday Night Live* was similarly hitching its wagon to alternative rock. Nirvana appeared on the program's season premiere a week after Radiohead's *Late Night* performance and the 1993-1994 season was peppered with contemporaries like the Smashing Pumpkins, Stone Temple Pilots, and Counting Crows. O'Brien also demonstrated his musical savvy when assembling his house band. With Michaels' blessing, O'Brien invited Max Weinberg to audition a few months before *Late Night's* return. The drummer made his name as a member of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, which broke up in 1989 as the singer-songwriter opted to reinvent himself as a solo artist instead of a band leader.¹²⁷ Weinberg attempted to stay busy by gigging extensively and launching a record label for his new group, Killer Joe.¹²⁸ But Weinberg seized the *Late Night* audition as an opportunity to get back on track and formed the Max Weinberg 7, which included guitarist Jimmy Vivino.¹²⁹ He also distanced himself from the E-Street Band's anthemic bar band sound by envisioning the Max Weinberg 7 as a jump blues combo to reflect the music he was making with Vivino in Killer Joe. After O'Brien hired them, Weinberg became *Late Night's* musical director while Vivino oversaw the show's musical arrangements.¹³⁰

Another contributor to *Late Night's* new musical identity was its talent coordinator, Jim Pitt. A Boston College graduate and former NBC page, Pitt worked for seven years on *Saturday*

¹²⁶ "The Breeders," *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, Season 1, Episode 9, September 23, 1993.

¹²⁷ Jan Hoffman, "A Drummer on a Roll Revisits His Past Life," *New York Times*, June 29, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/29/nyregion/public-lives-a-drummer-on-a-roll-revisits-his-past-life.html>.

¹²⁸ Robert Santelli, *Greetings From E Street: The Story of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band* (New York: Chronicle Books, 2006), 79-80.

¹²⁹ Peter Keepnews, "Leaping From E Street to 'Late Night,'" *New York Times*, November 28, 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/28/arts/television-leaping-from-e-street-to-late-night.html>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Night Live. This included a three-year stint as *SNL*'s music booker, a position that put him in proximity with future *30 Rock* producer Marci Klein and do damage control after Sinéad O'Connor tore up a picture of Pope John Paul II at the end of her performance of Bob Marley's "War."¹³¹ Pitt claimed instincts motivated his booking decisions, telling *Rolling Stone* that "I hear music. I like it. I put it on TV."¹³² Pitt elaborated to *Billboard*'s Jim Bessman that "I'm a fan of all sorts of music, so it's sort of like programming a little college station."¹³³ Pitt applied this ethos in his approach to reading *Billboard*. *SNL* required him to follow the pop charts. But for *Late Night*, he paid more attention to the trade's Heatseekers column to find new artists like Buffalo Tom and solicited lesser-known music veterans he loved, like Modern Lovers' frontman Jonathan Richman and power pop mainstays NRBQ. "These acts may be at the lower end of the [pop] charts, but it's more gratifying to book them and help them out ... I was always jealous of 'Letterman,' which could book four nights a week and a wider range of acts."¹³⁴

Despite Pitt's well-established Letterman fandom, he actually reversed *Late Night*'s early booking strategies under Letterman. Whereas *Late Night* often pilfered from *SNL* in its first few years, O'Brien introduced Green Day to broadcast network television nine months before the band appeared on *SNL*, with their breakthrough album *Dookie* racking up three hit singles in the interim.¹³⁵ Similarly, *Late Night* booked singer-songwriter Sheryl Crow months before she appeared on *The Late Show*. Pitt later revealed that the freedom he craved "to do more interesting things"¹³⁶ was by necessity, as he knew "we weren't going to be getting [the] big

¹³¹ Shirley Halperin and Joe Levy, "The White-Knuckle Bookings of TV's Music Power Brokers," *Billboard* 126, no. 37 (2014): 46.

¹³² Rick Marin, "Would You Please Welcome...," *Rolling Stone* 677 (1994): 17.

¹³³ Jim Bessman, "O'Brien's Late-Night Show Shines Light on New Acts," *Billboard* 106, no. 21 (1994): 9.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ David Fricke, "Dookie at 20: Billie Joe Armstrong on Green Day's Punk Blockbuster," *Rolling Stone*, February 3, 2014. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/dookie-at-20-billie-joe-armstrong-on-green-days-punk-blockbuster-20140203#ixzz3QGvGBb4N>.

¹³⁶ Bessman, "O'Brien's Late-Night Show Shines Light on New Acts," 8.

names”¹³⁷ that went on *The Late Show* and *The Tonight Show*. Such booking practices became a point of pride for Pitt, who later claimed that “[w]e love it when the introduction is, ‘making their American television debut’...[Y]ou can say late-night television is planting seeds for future stars.”¹³⁸ But it took a while for Pitt’s contributions to make an impact outside of Studio 6A.

By the time the Radiohead made their network debut on American television, their angst-ridden ode to unrequited love had been out for nearly a year. Featuring an impassioned, unhinged performance from lead singer Thom Yorke, who apparently recorded his vocals in one take, the band thought “Creep” would be their first hit single. Their representatives at EMI half-heartedly mounted a radio campaign¹³⁹ that ended once BBC Radio 1 refused to put it rotation because it was “too depressing.”¹⁴⁰ As a result, “Creep” only sold 6,000 copies during its initial run, and EMI tried to get traction for the band by rolling out *Pablo Honey*’s next single, “Anyone Can Play Guitar.”¹⁴¹ In the meantime and unbeknownst to the band, “Creep” got picked up in several international markets and on West Coast radio in the States.¹⁴² When the band appeared on *Late Night*, “Creep” was scaling the *Billboard* Hot 100 and had an accompanying performance clip that was in heavy rotation on MTV.¹⁴³ Though O’Brien never reached Radiohead’s level of fame in his chosen field, the host also struggled to find his footing as *Late Night*’s new host.

Despite Pitt’s efforts to break musical acts, few people watched. By the middle of 1994, NBC asked Nielsen to break down *Late Night*’s ratings by the half-hour, which revealed that the program dropped from a 1.8 rating to a 1.4 during the portion of the broadcast that featured

¹³⁷ Dombal, “Late Night.”

¹³⁸ Phil Gallo, “Night Life,” *Billboard* 123, no. 18 (2011): 25.

¹³⁹ Mac Randall, *Exit Music: The Radiohead Story* (New York: Delta, 2000), 84.

¹⁴⁰ Dave Jennings, “Creepshow,” *Melody Maker* 69, no. 39 (1993): 8.

¹⁴¹ Randall, 88.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 90-91.

¹⁴³ Gerald Marzorati, “The Post-Rock Band,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2000. <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/01/magazine/the-post-rock-band.html>.

musical guests.¹⁴⁴ These low returns were the result of a few factors. In addition to the network needing some break-in time for the host, who had never performed on television save for occasional extras work on *SNL*, *Late Night* was not immediately picked up by NBC's regional affiliates upon its debut or uniformly programmed in its proper timeslot. For example, from 1995 to 2005 *Late Night* aired at 2:10 a.m. in Houston due to minimal advertiser interest, prompting O'Brien to run a segment to see who was watching the show and stage competitions between two local advertisers.¹⁴⁵ NBC also requested returns from Nielsen to compare O'Brien's performance to his lead-in and predecessor, who were averaging a 4.1 and a 5.5 rating in 1994.¹⁴⁶ These figures indicated that O'Brien now had to differentiate himself from a variety of competitors.

The late-night landscape became increasingly crowded on both broadcast and cable television as O'Brien soldiered on. In 1995, CBS launched *The Late Late Show* as *Late Night*'s direct competitor, with Letterman selecting Tom Snyder as host.¹⁴⁷ A year later, Comedy Central launched *The Daily Show*.¹⁴⁸ After a thwarted film career and a string of MTV hosting jobs, comedian Jon Stewart inherited the program from Craig Kilborn in 1999 and oversaw it until 2015.¹⁴⁹ During Stewart's time at Comedy Central, the channel developed many successful original programs like *South Park*¹⁵⁰ and enjoyed ratings success with stand-up specials and reruns that often ran late at night. In 2001, the Cartoon Network launched [adult swim], a

¹⁴⁴ Bessman, "O'Brien's Late-Night Show Shines Light on New Acts," 8.

¹⁴⁵ Mike McDaniel, "Conan O'Brien Gets Late Night Revenge," *Houston Chronicle*, June 8, 2005. <http://www.chron.com/entertainment/article/Conan-O-Brien-show-finally-gets-early-time-slot-1569035.php>.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Davis Zurawik, "After a L-o-o-o-ng Wait, It's Tom Snyder Turned On In L.A.," *Baltimore Sun*, January 9, 1995. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1995-01-09/features/1995009116_1_tom-snyder-show-with-tom-late-late.

¹⁴⁸ Bill Carter, "Comedic Musical Chairs," *New York Times*, August 12, 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/12/arts/tv-notes-comedic-musical-chairs.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Joe Otterson, "Jon Stewart to Get Month-Long Send Off From Comedy Central," *The Wrap*, June 25, 2015. <http://www.thewrap.com/jon-stewart-to-get-month-long-send-off-from-comedy-central/>.

¹⁵⁰ David Wild, "South Park's Evil Geniuses," *Rolling Stone*, February 19, 1998. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/south-parks-evil-geniuses-19980219>.

programming block devoted to risqué or experimental live-action, animated, and syndicated content,¹⁵¹ and made its stamp by eclipsing *The Tonight Show*'s ratings with *Family Guy* reruns, resulting in Fox renewing the cancelled series.¹⁵² Thus unlike Letterman, who oversaw *Late Night* with little direct competition, O'Brien's sixteen-year run was largely defined by the host competing with both his predecessor's legacy and a variety of counterprogramming efforts.

While *Late Night* struggled in its timeslot during the 1990s, it did have value in the music industries. For example, a spokeswoman at Rykodisc representing the band Morphine noted that “[a] week after the [1994 O'Brien] show, SoundScan figures reflected a 60-percent increase in sales” for their album *Cure for Pain*.¹⁵³ Much of the show's musical identity relied upon Pitt maintaining good relationships with label representatives like Liz Rosenberg, Warner Bros' then-vice president of publicity, who proclaimed that “Jim and the ‘Conan O'Brien’ show is the savior of the music booker. It's the only major national TV show that takes a chance on emerging bands and gives them exposure performing live.”¹⁵⁴ Despite Rosenberg's grandstanding, such data gave *Late Night* evidence to present itself as a viable commodity by partnering with Mercury Records to release a compilation in 1997. *Live From 6A* curated performances from Jamiroquai, Soul Coughing, Squirrel Nut Zippers, and Morphine. Pitt and O'Brien were especially proud of the show's eclectic taste, with the host observing that “I like that we can have bands like Green Day and A Tribe Called Quest and then Tony Bennett and Mel Torme, which is credible because of the Max Weinberg 7. Music is essential to the show, especially because our hardcore fans are younger and take music seriously.”¹⁵⁵ *Live From 6A* sought to represent the show's commitment

¹⁵¹ Paula Bernstein, “Cartoon Net Dives Into ‘Adult Swim,’” *Variety* 383, no. 5 (2001): 45.

¹⁵² Tim Stack, “A Brief History of the ‘Family Guy,’” *Entertainment Weekly*, April 18, 2005. <http://www.ew.com/article/2005/04/18/brief-history-family-guy>.

¹⁵³ Marin, “Would You Please Welcome...”

¹⁵⁴ Bessman, “O'Brien's Late-Night Show Shines Light on New Acts,” 9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

to musical eclecticism. However, such a presence was less the result of diverse booking practices than a reflection of alternative rock's post-modern approach to generic hybridity, as Icelandic singer-songwriter Björk folded dance elements and aesthetic flourishes into her expressive sound, pastiche act Soul Coughing spliced in music samples as a nod to hip-hop production, and American combo Squirrel Nut Zippers put swing music in conversation with klezmer and the Delta blues. Nonetheless, *Live From 6A* represented *Late Night* as a viable space for musical discovery on network television, as the compilation was largely comprised of debut performances from now-respected artists like Ani DiFranco alongside David Bowie.

However, *Live From 6A* competed with *The Late Show's* compilation, which Reprise released in mid-November to coordinate with the winter shopping season.¹⁵⁶ *Live on Letterman: Music From the Late Show* featured a more generically diverse set of veteran rock and R&B artists like Lou Reed and Aretha Franklin, as well as cross-genre collaborations between country musician Lyle Lovett and soul singer Al Green. By contrast, *Live From 6A* clearly aligned with alternative rock and its hip consumer base, many of whom were reading about these recording artists in alt-friendly publications like *Spin* and watching their videos on MTV programs like *Alternative Nation* and *120 Minutes*.¹⁵⁷ In addition, Mercury targeted a number of U.S. college radio stations in its *Live From 6A* promotion campaign, and shipped the album to numerous modern rock and adult album alternative stations across the country, placement O'Brien supported with MTV appearance and a hosting stint on syndicated radio program *Modern Rock Live*.¹⁵⁸ *Late Show's* booker Sheila Rogers argued that its performances reflected Letterman's

¹⁵⁶ Craig Rosen, "Artists & Music: Reprise, Mercury Hit Market with Letterman, Conan Compilations," *Billboard* 109, no. 41 (1997): 15, 98.

¹⁵⁷ Melinda Newman, "'Live from 6A' Set Proves Conan's Commitment to Cutting-Edge Music," *Billboard* 109, no. 42 (1997): 14.

¹⁵⁸ Rosen, "Reprise, Mercury Hit Market with Letterman, Conan Compilations," 98.

and his audience's tastes as older viewers, claiming that "[w]e have the first pick of the alternative bands. We just don't necessarily want to be the first to play them. We give them a little time to become more comfortable on television."¹⁵⁹ Some label representatives were frustrated with Letterman's perceived apathy toward new music after leaving NBC,¹⁶⁰ which *Late Night* capitalized upon by foregrounding the show's early championing of emerging talent.

Arguably, *Late Night's* catering to the retail market through promotional paratexts like *Live From 6A* undermined the program's sense of liveness. Despite putting "live" in the title and keeping in audience noise from the original studio performances, the compilation actually removed live performances from their original context as audiovisual broadcast ephemera. Such ventures also reflected how liveness no longer brought together a sizable viewing audience for *Late Night* due to audience fragmentation and network and cable counterprogramming, even for a show that never garnered much of viewership relative to its lead-in because of its prohibitively late timeslot. As a result, *Late Night* attempted to pursue other ways to capture and measure its viewership by gathering its "significant" musical performances and creating products that gave NBC different metrics by which to measure audience interest beyond ratings. This, in turn, worked to cultivate the perception that *Late Night*, like *SNL* before it, was an institution worthy of respect and recognition for its efforts to discover and nurture compelling musical talent.

Such endeavors would continue in 2004 when the program released its ten-year anniversary special on DVD through NBC's distribution arrangement with Lionsgate.¹⁶¹ As a companion to *Live From 6A*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien: 10th Anniversary Special* connected *Late Night's* booking and performance practices to its reputation as a haven for

¹⁵⁹ Marin, "Would You Please Welcome..."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Brendan Howard, "Conan the Comedian Unleashes Anniversary & Dog on World," *Video Store Magazine* 26, no. 25 (2004): 82.

alternative comedy through its associations with emerging talent like David Cross and Amy Poehler, many of whom came from improv theatre, identified as fans of indie and alternative music, and applied punk's amateurism and do-it-yourself ethos as resources for creative expression. Cross and Poehler established themselves within certain circles through *Mr. Show* and *Upright Citizens Brigade*, which aired on HBO and Comedy Central in the late 90s and early 2000s. In addition, Cross's partner on *Mr. Show* was Bob Odenkirk, who previously worked with O'Brien in the writer's room at *SNL*.¹⁶² Some of their associates also began to do stand-up at music venues and toured as opening acts for alternative bands like *Late Night* favorite Yo La Tengo.¹⁶³ These were attempts to circumvent hostile comedy club appearances where staff and audiences were often less receptive to performers' ironic observational style, as Patton Oswalt did on his Comedians of Comedy tour with Maria Bamford, Zach Galifianakis, and Brian Posehn in 2005.¹⁶⁴ Thus the DVD reflected O'Brien's interest in showcasing these performers' talents and their shared interest in alternative music as an influence on their own comedic sensibilities.

The DVD's anniversary release also overlapped with NBC's decision to give *Late Night*'s rerun rights to Comedy Central, which began airing the previous night's 12:35 a.m. broadcast at 7 p.m. in September 2002 as part of a one-year deal that reportedly cost Comedy Central \$150,000 per week in licensing fees.¹⁶⁵ This was NBC's attempt to broaden *Late Night*'s audience beyond late-night appointment viewing by appealing to Comedy Central's audience, as well as pocket revenue for the network. In addition, Comedy Central was interested in seizing upon *Late Night*'s young male fanbase in order to synchronize with the channel's own male-

¹⁶² John Ortved, *The Simpsons: An Uncensored, Unauthorized History* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 184.

¹⁶³ Bob Mehr, "Comedy for Indie Rockers," *Chicago Reader*, August 25, 2006, B5.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ "At Deadline," *MediaWeek* 12, no. 12 (2002): 5; "Comedy Nabs 'Conan,'" *Variety* 386, no. 6 (2002): 27.

oriented programming and promotional strategies at the time and promptly renewed its rerun agreement for another year.¹⁶⁶ O'Brien, by this point no stranger to NBC's various tactics to inflate *Late Night's* ratings, supported the decision even at the expense of further distancing the program from its original live, late-night context. "I feel that I've proven that I can do a show that I don't think has to exist at 12:30. I think I do a show that has done well on Comedy Central. I'm meeting people all the time who only know it in that context, who only see it at 6 or 7 o'clock."¹⁶⁷ The deal was valuable to NBC, which finally captured the young adult audience it had been trying to court through appointment viewing and promotional paratexts for the first ten years of its run, and agreed to renew with Comedy Central through August 2004.¹⁶⁸ These reruns also gave musical guests additional exposure, as their performances remained intact on Comedy Central. This gave acts like Spoon and Ted Leo and the Pharmacists access to the Viacom-owned cable network's young viewing audience. Such exposure mattered, particularly since these bands could no longer rely on MTV as a distributor after it moved its long-running alternative video program *120 Minutes*, once a viable place for musical discovery that Pitt referred to in his earlier *Late Night* booking decisions, to sister channel MTV2 before its cancellation in 2003.¹⁶⁹

By the mid-2000s, O'Brien was also preparing for the next phase of his career. In 2004, it was announced that the host would replace Leno on *The Tonight Show* in 2009.¹⁷⁰ *Late Night* would remain on the air until the transition. This resulted in a few high-profile moments like the October 2005 episode devoted to U2, who were in the middle of an extensive world tour aided

¹⁶⁶ Alan Sepinwall, "It's Repurposed and Cable-Ready," *Variety* 280, no. 50 (2003): B2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Josef Adalian, "'Conan' Repeats Success," *Variety* 279, no. 21 (2003): 1, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Ryan Bray, "How the Face of Independent Music Changed in 120 Minutes," *Consequence of Sound*, March 11, 2016. <http://consequenceofsound.net/2016/03/how-the-face-of-independent-music-changed-in-120-minutes/>.

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Wallenstein, "O'Brien to Succeed Leno as 'Tonight' Host in '09," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 28, 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20100719062944/http://www.hollywoodreporter.com:80/hr/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000642741.

by a lucrative endorsement deal with Apple, which released a special edition iPod to promote their new album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*.¹⁷¹ As the host's only guests that night, the Irish rock band played three songs and participated in an in-depth discussion about their career.¹⁷² *Late Night* was waylaid by the 2007-2008 Writers Guild Strike, which targeted DVD residual rates for television and film screenwriters and was a cause O'Brien championed as a former comedy writer who was concerned about his staff's rights and paid them out of pocket.¹⁷³ Beyond that, O'Brien worked on assembling his *Tonight Show* team, which included Pitt but not Weinberg. The drummer had a diminished presence on the show since 1999 after Springsteen reformed the E Street Band, resulting in prolonged hiatuses from *Late Night* due to touring.¹⁷⁴ Weinberg also declined O'Brien's offer to join *The Tonight Show* because he did not want to relocate to Burbank from *Late Night*'s New York City home base.¹⁷⁵ Thus Vivino succeeded Weinberg as *The Tonight Show*'s new band leader and musical director.

Late Night aired its last episode with O'Brien on February 20, 2009. Prior to his final sign-off the host introduced the evening's musical guests, The White Stripes, who first appeared on the program during a one-week residency in 2003 to promote their breakout record, *Elephant*.¹⁷⁶ The host used the program as a space to perform his fandom for the Detroit garage outfit, who would appear multiple times on the program during its last years. The band also used *Late Night* as part of the treatment for director Michel Gondry's video for their single, "The Denial Twist," which used forced perspective to depict the band and O'Brien in various

¹⁷¹ Chuck Klosterman, "Mysterious Days," *Spin*, November 29, 2004. <http://www.spin.com/2004/11/mysterious-days/>.

¹⁷² Michael Learmonth, "Conan Cues Up Hour of U2," *Variety* 289, no. 3 (2005): 2.

¹⁷³ Cynthia Littleton and Michael Schneider, "O'Brien Helps Staff During Strike," *Variety*, November 29, 2007. <http://variety.com/2007/scene/markets-festivals/o-brien-helps-staff-during-strike-1117976716/>.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Hilburn, "Back on Thunder Road," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1999, F1.

¹⁷⁵ Dave Itzkoff, "The Music Changes for Conan O'Brien," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2010, C3(L).

¹⁷⁶ Austin Scaggs, "White Stripes Invade New York," *Rolling Stone* 923 (2003): 18.

proportions as a nod to Studio 6A appearing larger than its actual size on television, a production detail that reinforced the constructedness of live musical performance as an important component to *Late Night*'s broadcast legacy.¹⁷⁷ The White Stripes played "We Are Gonna Be Friends," a song O'Brien would occasionally strum on guitar during rehearsals. The host also connected to the song's simple melody to the program, observing that "I'd like to think there's been a silly sweetness to our show. There's a sweetness to the White Stripes ... that I think resonates a little bit with our show and it's always been a good fit."¹⁷⁸ This question of fit, and the extent to which the program's comedic sensibility lined up with O'Brien's love for alternative rock, also tacitly reinforced the host's white privilege in his affiliation with the genre. In O'Brien's prescient efforts to twine alternative rock with comedy, many of the people who benefited from *Late Night*'s discovery were white men and women. Thus it would take O'Brien's successor, a die-hard *SNL* fan with a knack for musical impersonation, to slightly dislodge *Late Night*'s hegemonic associations with indie and alternative rock by recruiting a venerated hip-hop group as his house band and foreground their contributions to music-based segments and performances.

Everything I Like

"The one thing that I'm trained to do that the other hosts aren't is I'm more of an entertainer," Jimmy Fallon told *Rolling Stone*'s Brian Hiatt, putting a bead on how he attempted to distinguish himself within a congested late-night schedule and from his immediate predecessor, Conan O'Brien, as *Late Night*'s new host.¹⁷⁹ "I come from a *Saturday Night Live* background, so I'm used to doing sketches and singing and dancing and doing impressions, and

¹⁷⁷ Devin Friedman, "The Big Bong Theory," *GQ* 78, no. 2 (2008): 90.

¹⁷⁸ Caryn Ganz, "White Stripes' Final 'Late Night' Gig," *Rolling Stone*, February 20, 2009. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/white-stripes-final-late-night-gig-conan-obrien-on-special-relationship-with-jack-and-meg-20090220>.

¹⁷⁹ Brian Hiatt, "Jimmy Fallon's Big Adventure," *Rolling Stone*, January 20, 2011. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/jimmy-fallons-big-adventure-20110120>.

playing guitar, so I should use that to my advantage.”¹⁸⁰ Fallon made his *Late Night* debut in early March of 2009 to strong early ratings. In his first week on the job, Fallon beat out his direct competitor, *Late Late Show* host Craig Ferguson, by half a million viewers and raised *Late Night*’s viewership by 21% from O’Brien’s average of 991,000 viewers for his last season of the program.¹⁸¹ Fallon also reportedly had the most watched premiere week of any broadcast network host in the past decade, garnering 2.9 million viewers against Jimmy Kimmel’s 2003 debut on ABC’s *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, which netted 1.7 million viewers in its first week.¹⁸² Though these initial returns did not eclipse critics’ tepid response to Fallon,¹⁸³ they did gesture toward his pre-established celebrity. Fallon debuted as a featured player on *Saturday Night Live* in 1998 and quickly became a breakout star due in part to his gift for musical impersonation.¹⁸⁴ Much like former cast member Adam Sandler, Fallon made music an important part of his comedic identity by playing holiday parody songs on *Weekend Update* in the style of then-contemporary songs by late-90s alt-rock radio staples like Matchbox 20 and Alanis Morissette. Fallon was promoted to the main cast the next season and parlayed his fame into hosting stints for MTV’s Movie and Video Music Awards,¹⁸⁵ a Grammy-nominated comedy album,¹⁸⁶ and supporting performances in films like Cameron Crowe’s *Almost Famous*.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Daniel Frankel, “Latenight High for Jimmy Fallon,” March 12, 2009. <http://variety.com/2009/scene/features/latenight-high-for-jimmy-fallon-1118001167/>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Tom Shales, “TV Review: ‘Late Night With Jimmy Fallon,’” *Washington Post*, March 4, 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/03/AR2009030301439.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Dave Itzkoff, “Extended Interview with Jimmy Fallon,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/25/arts/television/jimmy-fallon-snl-audition-interview.html?_r=0&mtref=en.wikipedia.org&gwh=2BF25BEEE875BB018B3B05571A1C223A&gwt=pay.

¹⁸⁵ Katherine Stroup, “Q+A: Jimmy Fallon,” *Newsweek* 140, no. 9 (2002): 63; Dalton Ross, “MTV’s Fallon Hero,” *Entertainment Weekly* 599 (2001): 57.

¹⁸⁶ Chris Norris, “Jimmy Fallon: ‘The Bathroom Wall,’” *Spin* 18, no. 10 (2002): 115.

¹⁸⁷ Hiatt, “Jimmy Fallon’s Big Adventure.”

Fallon left *SNL* in 2004 to pursue movie stardom, envisioning for himself “a Johnny Depp career, with a Mike Meyers background” that never came to fruition.¹⁸⁸ But while vehicles like *Taxi* and *Fever Pitch* stalled, they gave Fallon experience with promotional work as he learned to sit on the other side of a talk show host’s desk and talk up various projects. Executive producer Lorne Michaels, who developed a paternal bond with Fallon during his time at *SNL*, negotiated a holding deal for him at NBC in February 2007 in anticipation of O’Brien’s *Tonight Show* move.¹⁸⁹ Ever the dutiful son, Fallon polished his stage act by booking stand-up gigs.¹⁹⁰ Despite Michaels’ oversight *Late Night*’s successorship was met with resistance, at least according to Fallon, who claimed that NBC executives were comparing the venture to original *SNL* cast member Chevy Chase’s short-lived Fox talk show after his film career tanked.¹⁹¹ The production seized on this aspect of Fallon’s star text, with announcer Steve Higgins proclaiming “[y]ou loved him on *SNL*! You hated him in the movies! Now you’re ambivalent.”¹⁹² While David Letterman oversaw *Late Night* with wry detachment and O’Brien positioned himself as a discerning comedy and music nerd, Fallon embodied “the comedy of unabashed celebration,” according to critic Adam Sternbergh.¹⁹³ This estimation mirrored Tina Fey’s assessment of her former *Weekend Update* co-anchor, who she described as “your little brother who wants to do a show for everybody at Thanksgiving.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, even though Fallon eventually described *The*

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Tim Stack, “Jimmy Fallon: The New King of *Late Night*,” *Entertainment Weekly*, April 29, 2009. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090425060037/http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20262336,00.html>.

¹⁹⁰ Kevin Pang, “Jimmy Fallon: Host for a Twittering Society,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 2, 2009. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-03-02/entertainment/0903010190_1_astral-weeks-talk-tonight-show.

¹⁹¹ Jeanne Marie Laskas, “Jimmy Fallon: The New King of *Late Night* TV,” *GQ*, March 20, 2013. <http://www.gq.com/story/jimmy-fallon-interview-gq-april-2013>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Adam Sternbergh, “Mr. Sunshine,” *New York Magazine*, November 7, 2010. <http://nymag.com/arts/tv/profiles/69366/>.

¹⁹⁴ Hiatt, “Jimmy Fallon’s Big Adventure.”

Tonight Show as “everything I like” when he took it over in 2014, the same ethos applied to his *Late Night* run, including his claim that music was “a big part of the show.”¹⁹⁵

Late Night still had a toe-hold on indie music when booker Jonathan Cohen, a former *Billboard* editor,¹⁹⁶ replaced Jim Pitt. Unlike Pitt, who purposely brought in more obscure acts, Cohen claimed that the program now wanted “to be in business with the next generation of chart-topping, arena-headlining artists.”¹⁹⁷ An artist’s ability to pull down a *Late Night* debut performance was supposedly still an important milestone, which Matador’s publicity director Nils Bernstein claimed to be an important part of “the overall campaign of an interesting band.”¹⁹⁸ But under Cohen’s direction, *Late Night* gave more time to up-and-coming pop stars like Ariana Grande and Carly Rae Jepsen, who came to *Late Night* with social media followings that the program could build upon, as well as acts like Matador’s British post-punk outfit Savages. *Late Night* was once perceived as “too cool” or “too niche” for mainstream recording artists. But now bona fide pop stars were appearing on the program. For example, Beyoncé performed her hit “Countdown” in a pre-taped segment that aired in 2011.¹⁹⁹ Similarly, Fallon took advantage of his friendship with Justin Timberlake, with whom he frequently collaborated on *Saturday Night Live*, by giving him a week-long stint in March 2013 as the program’s artist in residence as part of the rollout for his new album, *The 20/20 Experience*.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Jonathan Ringen, “Jimmy Fallon on His A-List Guests and Runaway Tonight Show Success,” *Billboard*, September 17, 2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/magazine-feature/6699719/jimmy-fallon-tonight-show-success-guests-stephen-colbert>.

¹⁹⁶ Melinda Newman, “40 Under 40: Jonathan Cohen,” *Billboard*, August 2, 2012. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/biz/articles/news/1084342/40-under-40-jonathan-cohen>.

¹⁹⁷ Reggie Ugwu, “Not Ready for Prime Time,” *Billboard* 125, no. 45 (2013): 37.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Alex Young, “Beyoncé and the Roots Play ‘Countdown’ on Fallon,” *Consequence of Sound*, November 12, 2011. <http://consequenceofsound.net/2011/11/video-beyonce-and-the-roots-play-countdown-on-fallon/>.

²⁰⁰ John Jurgensen, “Bringing Justin Back,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2013. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324582804578346153959721958>.

As a result, *Late Night* appeared to more openly champion musical eclecticism than it had in the program's previous indie- and alternative-centric iterations. Cohen claimed that Fallon "wanted to emphasize variety"²⁰¹ in the show's booking and performance decisions. Fallon proclaimed that the voice of *Late Night* was "the voice of an iPod."²⁰² This metaphor reflected key technological shifts that facilitated music's immateriality in the years since Letterman and O'Brien, as well as influenced the program's production practices. Band leader and musical director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson DVR'd other talk shows to minimize overlap between bookings, Fallon used Shazam during his commute to find talent, and Cohen curated YouTube playlists for Fallon.²⁰³ The show's booking and performance choices were modeled on an imagined listener of a digital audio player accessing a universe of music through headphones instead of a die-hard rock fan clutching a stack of records. This meant that artists encompassing a wider generic range were making their debut on *Late Night*, including rapper Kendrick Lamar, dance act Disclosure, and throwback soul combo Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings, alongside more seasoned artists like Prince and Paul McCartney.²⁰⁴ Such diversity was also strengthened by the Roots' presence as *Late Night*'s new house band. Cohen claimed that Beyoncé "personally reached out and said she not only wanted to perform on the show, but also wanted to use the Roots as her backing band."²⁰⁵ They also accompanied a variety of performers, including rapper M.I.A. and indie singer-songwriter Bon Iver, and would demonstrate their centrality *Late Night*'s post-O'Brien reinvention in a number of ways.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Phil Gallo, "Night Life," 24.

²⁰² Nisha Gopalan, "Jamming With Jimmy," *Billboard*, February 7, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5900978/jimmy-fallon-cover-story-questlove-jonathan-cohen-tonight>.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Newman, "40 Under 40."

²⁰⁶ Gopalan, "Jamming With Jimmy."

Long before the Roots were *Late Night*'s house band, they were an afterschool pastime between two classmates attending the Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts. In 1987, Thompson and Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter started to synthesize their respective scholarly interests in jazz drumming and poetry and performed under a variety of names, including Radio Activity and Black to the Future, before settling on the Square Roots.²⁰⁷ By the early 90s the band had shortened their name and expanded into a proper band with vocalists Kenyatta Warren and Malik B., bassists Josh "Rubberband" Abrams and Leonard Hubbard, and keyboardist Scott Storch, who appeared on the group's self-released debut, *Organix*, in 1993.²⁰⁸ They quickly became identified by music critics as pioneers of what the music press referred to as "neo-soul," a neologism describing the fusion of hip-hop and R&B that was also applied to frequent Roots collaborators D'Angelo, Erykah Badu, and Jill Scott, who connected with the political and musical legacies of 70s-era black soul musicians and distanced themselves from the materialism, misogyny, and homophobia frequently associated with mainstream rap of the period.²⁰⁹ By the early 2000s, Thompson began to branch out. He received an invitation from *Chappelle's Show* co-creator Neal Brennan to serve as musical director on its second season, which required him to compose music cues and soundalikes for various skits and segments.²¹⁰ Thompson claimed that the experience of "mixing music and entertainment, using all my accumulated knowledge to execute these precise little orders, was the best preparation imaginable for my Fallon job, though I didn't know it yet."²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (New York: Grant Central Publishing, 2013), 88.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 90-92.

²⁰⁹ Dimitri Ehrlich, "Young Soul Rebels," *Vibe* 10, no. 2 (2002): 72.

²¹⁰ Thompson, *Mo' Meta Blues*, 217-218.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

By 2008, the group had released eight full-length albums on DGC, MCA, Interscope, and Def Jam over the course of their fifteen-year recording. After weathering several line-up changes, label disputes, and international tours, the group wanted more stability away from the exhausting work conditions of the studio and the road.²¹² Fallon seized upon these issues when he invited him to join *Late Night* as his house band. Thompson told *NPR*'s Terry Gross that "the initial pitch was like, look, you guys will be in one place. You'll get to see your family more. You're only doing eight minutes of music combined a week. You know, it's a great check. Have fun."²¹³ Thompson later described *Late Night* gig as "a day job in the best sense. We're in by noon and gone by seven, and in between we make a show. It's highly structured, and as a result, the opportunities we have for creativity are really distilled: not reduced at all, but disciplined."²¹⁴

However, the Roots and their team had misgivings when Fallon first presented the idea to them in 2008. Their manager, Richard Nichols, thought the offer was a joke and did not return Fallon's call for three months.²¹⁵ NBC executives were also reticent toward the band. According to Thompson, Michaels worried that the band "with such a strong identity" would steal Fallon's spotlight, while the host felt pressure to assemble a house band that was "bigger than Max Weinberg, because that was the hottest thing out there."²¹⁶ As a symptom of late-night programming's ongoing diversity issues, NBC executives were also worried that the band, particularly Trotter, would be "too urban" to appeal to a broad, or white, audience. Fallon recalled being asked "'[d]o we need the rapper? What is the rapper going to do?' They were just saying 'rapper' because they didn't want to say [Trotter's alias] 'Black Thought.' It was not an

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Terry Gross, "Questlove's Roots," *NPR*, June 24, 2013. <http://www.npr.org/2013/06/24/190420270/questloves-roots-a-meta-memoir-of-a-lifetime-in-music>.

²¹⁴ Thompson, *Mo' Meta Blues*, 259.

²¹⁵ Burkhard Bilger, "The Rhythm in Everything," *New Yorker*, November 12, 2012. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/11/12/the-rhythm-in-everything>.

²¹⁶ Gopalan, "Jammin' with Jimmy."

easy sell for white guy talking to a bunch of white guys.”²¹⁷ Thompson’s told *NPR*’s Eric Deggans that “[t]he feelings at NBC were sorta like, ‘Well, we know they’re a good rap group but, what if we have [country artist] Tom T. Hall on the show? Do they have range?’”²¹⁸ Despite the band improvising cross-genre musical medleys for years as a staple of their live act,²¹⁹ which appealed to Fallon as a fan,²²⁰ NBC hired the Roots on a 13-week probationary period. To test their fit, the Roots were asked to perform a wide range of music with little to no rehearsal on air. Thompson recalled that “they’d come and be like, ‘You guys got three minutes to come up with an Andrew Lloyd Webber reference.’”²²¹ This was how the band developed their recurring bit “Freestylin’ with the Roots,” an update on Johnny Carson’s “Stump the Band” segment on *The Tonight Show* that demonstrated the band’s knowledge of NBC history and cleverly positioned them as an integral part of its reinvention.²²² After they proved their “musicianship,” NBC’s executives abandoned the probationary measure and allowed them to fully integrate.²²³

Despite this victory, one small part of Fallon’s original pitch to the band did not come to pass. The Roots were promised that they would “only [be] doing eight minutes of music combined a week.”²²⁴ In retrospect, this was a conservative estimate. Cohen claimed that “[o]nce we figured out how many ways we could use the Roots as part of the performances, that kicked things up a bit. Their presence allows us to do things completely unique to the show.”²²⁵ Like previous house band’s the Roots performed the show’s theme song, which Thompson composed,

²¹⁷ Bilger, “The Rhythm in Everything.”

²¹⁸ Eric Deggans, “Questlove And The Roots: How a Hip-Hop Band Conquered Late Night,” *NPR*, July 3, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/07/03/328167474/questlove-and-the-roots-how-a-hip-hop-band-conquered-late-night>.

²¹⁹ Aaron Ross, “A Guy Called Quest,” *Mother Jones* 36, no. 6 (2011): 60.

²²⁰ Jessica Diehl and David Kamp, “Heeeeere’s Jimmy,” *Vanity Fair*, January 7, 2014. <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2014/02/jimmy-fallon-the-tonight-show-new-york>

²²¹ Deggans, “Questlove and the Roots.”

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Gross, “Questlove’s Roots.”

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

as well as short interstitial numbers called bumpers as the broadcast cut to commercial. But the band's improvisatory skills, musicianship, and deep knowledge of pop history made them an asset to the program that Fallon would draw upon for a variety of live segments that required musical accompaniment. The host and Timberlake teamed up several times for "The History of Rap," crowd-pleasing medleys comprised of snippets from well-known hip-hop songs spanning multiple eras by Run D.M.C., Snoop Dogg, Eminem, and the Beastie Boys.²²⁶ Fallon shimmied in drag alongside First Lady Michelle Obama for "Evolution of Mom Dancing" to promote her "Let's Move" campaign.²²⁷ Finally, "Slow Jam the News" required the host to read headlines in a sultry voice with the house band providing quiet storm accompaniment, often alongside guests like former *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams and President Barack Obama.²²⁸

Thompson also arranged different walkovers, or short instrumental themes that accompanied guests' stroll to the couch, in honor of former *Late Night* band leader Paul Shaffer who Thompson referred to as "[t]he king of the walkover."²²⁹ Thompson's walkover cues were always unique to the guest. When actress Salma Hayek visited the band played the theme song to *Theresa*, a Mexican soap opera she starred in before arriving in Hollywood.²³⁰ They also used the walkover as a form of political critique, as when they used Fishbone's "Lyin' Ass Bitch" to accompany Representative and presidential candidate Michele Bachmann's procession, to some

²²⁶ Aaron Couch, "Justin Timberlake and Jimmy Fallon's 5 Best Collaborations," *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 20, 2013. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/justin-timberlake-jimmy-fallons-5-667103>; Brad Wete, "Justin Timberlake Wraps 'Late Night with Jimmy Fallon' Stay with 'History of Rap 4' and Old Hits," *Billboard*, March 16, 2013. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/1552396/justin-timberlake-wraps-late-night-with-jimmy-fallon-stay-with>; Brad Wete, "Justin Timberlake Wraps 'Late Night with Jimmy Fallon' Stay with 'History of Rap 4' and Old Hits," *Billboard*, March 16, 2013. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/1552396/justin-timberlake-wraps-late-night-with-jimmy-fallon-stay-with>; Hiatt, "Jimmy Fallon's Big Adventure."

²²⁷ Bill Carter, "Bullish on Boyish," *New York Times*, February 12, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/arts/television/nbc-hopes-jimmy-fallon-brings-younger-viewers-to-tonight.html?_r=0.

²²⁸ Tim Stack, "Adventures in Late Night with Jimmy Fallon," *Entertainment Weekly* 1093 (2010): 44-47.

²²⁹ Bilger, "The Rhythm in Everything."

²³⁰ Thompson, *Mo' Meta Blues*, 259-260.

controversy after Thompson glibly confirmed the instrumental version of the cue for a fan on Twitter.²³¹ Fallon's repartee with Thompson also reversed the Shaffer-Letterman dynamic, with the deadpan band leader often reacting silently to the host's slick, enthusiastic patter during the show. This reflected Thompson's role not only as *Late Night's* current band leader and arranger, but also the ways in which the show captured Thompson's raised industrial profile similarly to Shaffer's pop music ambassadorship, which began during his time on *Late Night*. Thompson began to pursue other musical projects. He composed original music for *Inside Amy Schumer* and Chris Rock's 2014 film *Top Five*²³² and became a celebrated deejay through his weekly dance parties at the Brooklyn Bowl.²³³ Thompson also followed in Shaffer's footsteps through their involvement with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Shaffer has been musical director in 1986, while Thompson balanced his on-air responsibilities with his work on the Rock Hall's nominating committee, where he "worked the room like Frank Underwood works Congress" to get acts like Philly blue-eyed soul duo Hall & Oates on the ballot according to one member.²³⁴

The Roots' presence on the show reflected something of a paradigm shift in terms of *Late Night's* generic affiliations and, by extension, the program's racial diversification. This was also signified through their supportive presence for *Late Night's* musical guests, which would contribute to the significance of Frank Ocean's network television debut with the program. Fallon's *Late Night* team drew upon various digital technologies as tools to discover new talent and present them to the show's audience. This in turn created an expectation that the show's musical guests were savvy social media users who gave their fans access to the intimate contexts

²³¹ Ibid., 261-264.

²³² Joe Levy, "Chris Rock and Questlove Talk the Greatest MCs of All Time and Collaborating on New Movie 'Top Five,'" *Billboard*, December 8, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/6386019/chris-rock-and-questlove-talk-new-movie-top-five>.

²³³ Amanda Mester, "Brooklyn Bowl Celebrates 5 Years of Bowl Train with DJ ?uestlove," *AXS*, June 24, 2014. <http://www.axs.com/brooklyn-bowl-celebrates-5-years-of-bowl-train-with-dj-uestlove-12991>.

²³⁴ Tannenbaum, "Jann Wenner Answers Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 'Too Male, Too White, Too Rich' Critics."

surrounding their work—upload links to demos, status updates, behind-the-scenes smartphone photos—in order to make fandom an immersive and interactive process of discovery that could then be commodified by the music and television industries. Such expectations were not unique to *Late Night*, as scholars like Tim Anderson and Jeremy Morris note that digital technology and social media have facilitated musicians’ entrepreneurship within an industrial context that has shifted from a material- to a service-based economy and requires different strategies to produce and share music.²³⁵ But *Late Night* reflected that shift, as Thompson noted in his *Billboard*-facilitated conversation with Twitter co-founder Biz Stone in 2011 about the networking service’s value as a promotional tool for musicians. “I realized that I could use Twitter to finally cut down that velvet rope or fourth wall that so-called entertainers are supposed to have,” Thompson said, noting that he could share a variety of things with his 1.5 million followers—daily musings, real-time coverage of industry events, clips of *Late Show* rehearsals with musical guests—in order “to show how ‘normal’ the life I lead actually is.”²³⁶ Thompson also spoke of Twitter as a “modern-day Paul Revere” that enabled musicians to discover and promote artists by citing an instance when he recorded a Dirty Projectors’ performance on his Flip cam and posted the clip on Twitter. “The next day I woke up and every blog from Pitchfork to whatever had that clip on.”²³⁷ It is through Twitter that Thompson discovered hip-hop collective Odd Future, who made their broadcast network debut with *Late Night* in February 2011.²³⁸ It was also upon this spreadable next-day coverage that the group’s associate, singer-songwriter Frank Ocean (born

²³⁵ Jeremy Wade Morris, “Artists as Entrepreneurs, Fans as Workers,” *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 273-290; Tim J. Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²³⁶ Anthony Bruno, “Between the Tweets,” *Billboard* 123, no. 10 (2011): 13.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

Christopher Breaux), used his debut performance on *Late Night* seventeen months later as a professional opportunity to be discovered and as a platform for a more personal declaration.

Toward the end of *Late Night*'s July 9 broadcast in 2012, the program came back from the commercial break that demarcated Fallon's interview with actress Rose Byrne from the night's musical performance. Looking directly into the camera, the host held up a vinyl copy of an album with a bright-orange cover and exclaimed, "[o]ur next guest—oh, we're excited about this—he is garnering huge buzz for his debut album, *Channel Orange*, which is available on iTunes right now and in stores July 17th. We're honored tonight to have his first-ever TV performance with the song, 'Bad Religion.' With a little help from the Roots, please welcome Frank Ocean!"²³⁹ Though "Bad Religion" is in many ways a conventional breakup song, the chorus's use of male pronouns challenged hegemonic assumptions about hip-hop and R&B's black heteromascularity by starting clearly, "This unrequited love/To me it's nothing but a one-man cult/And cyanide in my Styrofoam cup/I could never make him love me."²⁴⁰ Such an admission, however small, was still a powerful one to make in the context of the music industries' prolonged history with homophobia that queer black men still have to shoulder. As Ocean later told *GQ*'s Amy Wallace, "[i]n black music, we've got so many leaps and bounds to make with acceptance and tolerance in regard to that issue. It reflects something just ingrained, you know. Some of my heroes coming up [still] talk recklessly like that."²⁴¹

Just after midnight on U.S. Independence Day and five days before Ocean graced Studio 6B, the singer published an open letter on Tumblr that put "Bad Religion," which he would perform on *Late Night*, in a new perspective. Ocean updated his Tumblr with a post that

²³⁹ "Frank Ocean," *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, Episode 666, July 12, 2012.

²⁴⁰ Frank Ocean, "Bad Religion," *Channel Orange* (New York: Def Jam, 2012).

²⁴¹ Amy Wallace, "Ocean-ography," *GQ*, November 20, 2012. <http://www.gq.com/story/frank-ocean-interview-gq-december-2012>.

consisted of a screen grab containing two long paragraphs and a sign-off formatted in Pages. The entry, entitled “thank you’s,” was an excerpt from the liner notes to his forthcoming album that dated back to December 27, 2011.²⁴² It was in this form that Ocean addressed the song’s subject as his “first love,” who the performer met when “I was 19 years old. He was too.”²⁴³ Ocean’s liner notes excerpt went on to reveal the secret affair that formed out of their friendship, which stretched across two summers. The romance caught both men by surprise, as they had previously been involved with women. Through elliptical language, Ocean addressed the sexual nature of their relationship and the devastation he felt when his partner admitted that he did not want to go public with their love as a couple. “Imagine being thrown from a plane,” Ocean wrote.²⁴⁴ “I wasn’t in a plane though. I was in a Nissan Maxima, the same car I packed up with bags and drove to Los Angeles in. I say there and told my friend how I felt. I wept as the words left my mouth. I grieved for them, knowing I could never take them back from myself.”²⁴⁵ Ocean elaborated on his heartache as he recalled sitting in his parked car outside of his lover’s apartment, absorbing that his partner could not allow himself to reciprocate the singer’s feelings. “He patted my back. He said kind things. He did his best, but he wouldn’t admit the same. He had to go back inside soon. It was late and his girlfriend was waiting for him upstairs. He wouldn’t tell me the truth about his feelings for me for another 3 years.”²⁴⁶ Ocean struggled to breathe but peeled out of the parking lot to live his life. He concluded by thanking “my first love.

²⁴² Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, “Why Frank Ocean’s Coming Out Tumblr Post is as Complex and Deep as His Lyrics,” *Spin*, July 5, 2012. <http://www.spin.com/2012/07/why-frank-oceans-coming-out-tumblr-post-complex-and-deep-his-lyrics/>.

²⁴³ Frank Ocean, “thank you’s,” *Frank Ocean*, July 4, 2012. <http://frankocean.tumblr.com/post/26473798723>.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

I'm grateful for you. Grateful that even though it wasn't what I hoped for and even though it was never enough, it was. Some things never are, and we were. I won't forget you."²⁴⁷

Ocean's Tumblr post signified liveness in multiple ways. For one, Ocean presented this text as a screen grab from Apple Pages and with it all of the information embedded in its interface—the tool bar across the top of the screen, the scroll bar on the right—to create a sense that the reader was accessing something private. For another, he decided to post this image, which supposedly came from a document Ocean wrote months before on “a plane back to Los Angeles from New Orleans”²⁴⁸ as a nod to the industrial reflexivity often embedded in musical practices like liner note composition, on a microblog in the middle of the night. Its tone also suggested that the user needed to get something off his chest to clear his mind before bed. Finally, the post signified the immediacy of digital communication through Ocean's use of caps lock and his decision to keep in various syntax errors like fragments and comma splices.

This sense of immediacy was also clearly calculated. At the time, Ocean's fan base was feverishly awaiting the release of his debut studio album, *Channel Orange*. Odd Future's manager Christian Clancy anticipated such a reception for months. He recommended that Cohen book the singer shortly before the act's amicable *Late Night* experience, as Ocean released *nostalgia, ULTRA*. on Tumblr days before collective members Tyler, the Creator and Hodgy Beats made their *Late Night* debut.²⁴⁹ By May, Ocean had signed with Def Jam, which executed *nostalgia, ULTRA*'s physical re-release in July.²⁵⁰ By the end of that month Ocean released his next album's lead single, a cover of singer Bridget Kelly's “Thinking Bout You,” and its cover

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Gopalan, “Jamming With Jimmy.”

²⁵⁰ Jacob Moore, “Frank Ocean's ‘nostalgia, ULTRA.’ Gets Def Jam Re-Release,” *Complex*, May 19, 2011. <http://www.complex.com/music/2011/05/frank-oceans-nostalgia-ultra-gets-def-jam-re-release>.

art the following April.²⁵¹ The original Tumblr post, which went live the day during a national holiday but just before the weekend that preceded Ocean's Monday night performance, had circulated and accrued critical resonance regarding its potential impact to widen the representational frame for queer black male musicians, which potentially imbued the performance with additional dramatic weight and import.²⁵² Several musicians also used social media to publicly support Ocean, including Beyoncé²⁵³ and Odd Future's Tyler, the Creator.²⁵⁴ Finally, Ocean and Def Jam premiered the album digitally a week ahead of its physical release. This suggested that the vinyl copy of *Channel Orange* that Fallon held was so new it technically did not exist, even though the album was available for fans to stream it in its digital form through iTunes immediately after Ocean's performance. "That pissed off everyone at retail. But it was amazing for us," Clancy mused, arguing that such strategizing primed *Channel Orange*'s debut at number two on the *Billboard 200* after its "official" July 17th release.²⁵⁵ It was upon these shifting discursive and industrial formations that Ocean mounted his broadcast network debut.

Ocean's performance relied upon a constructed intimacy that was accessible to both the live studio audience and the show's viewers watching the program on television or online the next day. This representation of intimacy was further reinforced by the on-screen presence of the

²⁵¹ Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, "Frank Ocean Has a Cold," *Spin*, April 17, 2012. <http://www.spin.com/2012/04/frank-ocean-has-cold/>.

²⁵² Jerry Portwood, "What Does Frank Ocean's Confessional Message Mean?," *Out*, July 6, 2012. <http://www.out.com/entertainment/popnography/2012/07/06/frank-ocean-confessional-message-analysis-gay-bisexual>; Ann Powers, "A Close Look at Frank Ocean's Coming Out Letter," *NPR*, July 5, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2012/07/04/156261612/a-close-look-at-frank-oceans-coming-out-letter>; Shepherd, "Why Frank Ocean's Coming Out Tumblr Post is as Complex and Deep as His Lyrics"; dream hampton, "Thank You, Frank Ocean," *Life and Times*, July 4, 2012. <http://lifeandtimes.com/thank-you-frank-ocean>; Amy Phillips, "Frank Ocean Opens Up About His Sexuality," *Pitchfork*, July 4, 2012. <http://pitchfork.com/news/47067-frank-ocean-opens-up-about-his-sexuality/>.

²⁵³ Beyoncé, "Inspiration: Frank Ocean," *Beyonce.com*, July 5, 2012. <http://www.beyonce.com/frank-ocean-2/>.

²⁵⁴ @fucktyler, "My Big Bother Finally Fucking Did That. Proud Of That N**** Cause I Know That Shit Is Difficult Or Whatever. Anyway. Im A Toilet," *Twitter*, July 3, 2012. <https://twitter.com/fucktyler/status/220409501487079424>.

²⁵⁵ Gopalan, "Jamming With Jimmy."

audience, as *Late Night*'s main stage was equipped with a railing immediately behind it to create a heightened sense of proximity between fan and musician that reinforced the program's sense of liveness by presenting an audience that is typically heard but unseen save for crowd shots on other late-night programs. This staging practice also differentiated Fallon's iteration of *Late Night* from his predecessors, as this set-up had not been experimented with prior to this run in the series and created a compelling visual bond between musician and audience that was then put in a new context when utilized to frame a poignant song about unrequited love that the singer seized upon as a resource for his decision to make his debut on NBC. The musicians' staging also mattered. "Bad Religion" included a string arrangement that imbued the lyrics' romantic angst with sonic pathos, particularly in the chorus. The song's string arrangement was performed by a septet positioned immediately to Ocean's left, pressed against the right side of the screen to visualize their proximity to the singer. Four members of the Roots rounded out the ensemble. Thompson, percussionist Frank Knuckles, and keyboardists Kamal Gray and James Poyser performed behind Ocean in a move that signified artistic collaboration and professional approval of a new artist from an established hip-hop act. Their literal and figurative backing of the singer also doubled as a powerful sound and image of emotional support for the newly out singer.

Ocean's performance also emphasized his singing over his other musical talents. Ocean was a keyboard player and he often accompanied himself in the studio. However, Ocean removed any major barrier for the camera by ceding accompaniment responsibilities to Gray and Poyser while he sang into a hand-held microphone. This professional decision maximized Ocean's interplay with the camera. Though Ocean mostly avoided eye contact with the studio or television audience and performed the majority of the song with his eyes closed or with a downcast gaze, much of "Bad Religion" was shot in close-up, making it possible for the camera

to pick up subtle nuances and changes to Ocean's facial expressions that reflected the song's thematic content and emotional nakedness. The dramatic charge of Ocean's performance and the camera's access to his face was frequently reinforced by audible breaks in the singer's voice throughout the entire performance, particularly at the beginning of the song when he sang the opening line "Hey taxi driver," the audience for Ocean's confession within the song, as well as the singer's rueful, gender-specific admission of unrequited love in the chorus.²⁵⁶

Within the show's simulated live performance space, Ocean's quiet, aching performance was rapturously received, with the audience in Studio 6B audibly cheering and offering loud, emphatic applause. The emotional resonance of his performance was reinforced by Fallon's performatively giddy reception. The host joyfully embraced the singer after his performance, enthusiastically repeating *Channel Orange*'s release date and announcing the beginning of his American tour, which kicked off in Seattle five days after his Monday night performance. The next week, *Channel Orange* debuted at number two on the *Billboard 200* by selling 131,000 units. By mid-September, he would appear as *Saturday Night Live*'s musical guest for its 38th season premiere with host Seth MacFarlane, thus reinforcing *Late Night*'s and *SNL*'s mutual dependence. The performance signaled the promise of a new generation of musicians with hybridic, intersectional approaches to hip-hop and R&B which *Late Night* attempted to capture. But it was ultimately a moment, not a sea change. A few months later Ocean's performance was taken down from *Late Night*'s YouTube page for licensing reasons, though various fan-made transfers still circulate on other unofficial streaming platforms. What is more, Fallon's successor Seth Meyers had different priorities in his booking practices for *Late Night* as its new host.

²⁵⁶ Otis Hart, "Six Things You Didn't See In Frank Ocean's 'Late Night' Performance." *NPR*, July 10, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/therecord/2012/07/10/156540609/six-things-you-didnt-see-in-frank-oceans-late-night-performance>.

Taking a Bow

On August 1, 2013, less than a year before Jimmy Fallon made his transition from the host of *Late Night* to *The Tonight Show*, R&B singer Robin Thicke appeared in a *Late Night* cold open. He performed a version of his blockbuster summer hit, “Blurred Lines” with the host and the Roots, who accompanied Thicke’s performance with children’s instruments. This was part of the show’s ongoing “Classroom Instruments” segment, which featured a vocalist performing his or her new hit single in the cramped quarters of the Fallon Band Room, with host and house band accompanying the performer on toy and miniature instruments along with other grade-school music room staples, like the xylophone, ukulele, wood block, and kazoo. As befitting the bit’s childlike aesthetic, many of the song’s risqué lyrics about recreational drug use, sexual predation, and female objectification were censored for broadcast. For example, as Thicke started to sing “You the hottest bitch in this place” from the song’s second verse, Fallon covered his mouth.

The “Classroom Instruments” segment became an important part of *Late Night* that allowed the program to maximize the Roots’ participation while minimizing some of the more controversial aspects of a musical guest’s lyrical content or self-presentation, an issue that frequently burdened artists associated with hip-hop and R&B and reflected some of the initial hesitation toward Fallon’s house band among the network’s executives. It also helped launch certain artists in a way that extended *Late Night*’s legacy as a site of musical discovery, however carefully coordinated between the television and music industries. For example, Carly Rae Jepsen’s “Classroom Instruments” performance of her single “Call Me Maybe” aired on June 8, 2012 was a mutually beneficial appearance for both Jepsen and *Late Night*. The segment capitalized on the newcomer’s social media presence and her song’s seemingly “out-of-nowhere” success as one of the year’s major hit records. In fact, Jepsen began her recording

career as a Canadian YouTube star discovered by Scooter Braun, the talent manager also responsible for the meteoric rise of Justin Bieber, a teen-pop sensation who also cultivated his fame through social media savvy.²⁵⁷ But Jepsen's appearance also served *Late Night*. Following its initial appearance, this "Classroom Instruments" segment became the most highly-watched video on the show's YouTube channel, attracting nearly 17.5 million views by early 2014.²⁵⁸

The recurring bit had another function. It was able to spread as bite-size viral content that could be extensively shared and reposted after an episode's original broadcast. This contributed to the program's commercial afterlife that reflected different consumption patterns around late-night variety programming in the digital age. Two weeks after the "Classroom Instruments" edit of "Blurred Lines" aired on NBC, *Variety* reporter Brian Steinberg reported that "[t]he scene has notched more than 8.8 million views via YouTube as of August 14 [2013], a far bigger crowd than the 1.8 million that watched that episode of 'Late Night.'"²⁵⁹ Such segments created new metrics of value for late-night programming following anxiety over ratings drops across broadcast late-night programming during the 2000s due to the proliferation of competing content on cable and network television, as well as a multitude of viewing options that chipped away at appointment viewing's primacy.²⁶⁰ These segments then served as a way to respond to an increasing number of viewers who do not watch the show live, and either caught up with the show days later on DVR or watched specific interviews, musical performances, and other segments online instead of tuned in for entire episodes of *Late Night* or its various competitors. "I'm usually out at a club seeing a band so I can book for the future," admitted *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* booker Scott Igoe, who claimed an affinity between his department and the younger

²⁵⁷ Jason Lipshutz, "An Impossibly Wonderful Year," *Billboard* 124, no. 44 (2012): 41-44.

²⁵⁸ Shirley Halperin, "Jimmy's Greatest Hits," *Billboard* 126, no. 5 (2014): 27.

²⁵⁹ Brian Steinberg, "Jimmy on the Spot," *Variety* 321, no. 4 (2013): 36-43.

²⁶⁰ Jeanine Poggi, "Late Night is Much More Than TV," *Advertising Age* 85 (4): 10.

audiences that use streaming sites like Spotify and YouTube to discover new music and catch “the next day online.”²⁶¹ In other words, while *Late Night* (and, by extension, its peers in broadcast late-night programming) could no longer rely on devoted inflexible appointment viewership, it could attract a substantial audience for segments that appeal to social media’s inclination for viral content. To achieve this level of virality, *Late Night* frequently relied upon musical segments, drawing upon short performances and the social networking savvy of its house band and its musical guests and their representation. These options allow users to have some form of autonomy (or, at least help construct an illusion of agency) in what, how, and when audiences choose to view programs, or particularly buzz-worthy segments of programs that may pop up as a news item, an uploaded clip, or a viral phenomenon literally overnight. By the time Fallon’s *Late Night* run ended in early February 2014, the show averaged 1.8 million viewers a night, saw a 10.4-percent increase in viewership after factoring in its “plus-7” ratings through DVR usage, and attracted two million subscribers to its YouTube channel.²⁶²

“Classroom Instruments” made the transition from *Late Night* to *The Tonight Show*, though it was eventually phased out to make room for segments like “Lip Sync Battle,” a recurring bit where a celebrity guest faces off against Fallon in a two- to three-song performance comprised of licensed recordings. The segment was hardly ever a battle. Fallon frequently deferred to his guests and sets them up to succeed by selling the virtuosity of their performances through his exaggerated enthusiasm as an audience member, as he did for actress Emma Stone’s lip sync to Blues Traveler’s AOR hit “Hook” and DJ Khaled’s club anthem “All I Do Is Win.”²⁶³

²⁶¹ Ibid., 47.

²⁶² John Jurgensen, “Television: The New Late-Night Landscape,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2014. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303650204579376890938376288>.

²⁶³ Rob Sheffield, “The Altar Boys of Late Night,” *Rolling Stone* (1205): 30.

Yet the host also developed the segment into a variety program he produced for Spike TV.²⁶⁴ Such segments helped create a market for *Late Late Show* host James Corden's breakout "Carpool Karaoke" series, an idea the host apparently got from his late-night rival Seth Meyers,²⁶⁵ which is currently in the process of being reformatted for international television markets.²⁶⁶ They were also perceived to reach more of a critical consensus among viewers than musical guests, whose reception was often dependent upon individual taste.²⁶⁷

"Classroom Instruments" and "Lip Sync Battle" also tended to enjoy a more stable afterlife online through platforms like *Late Night*'s YouTube channel, which is not uniformly shared among the musical performances that traditionally conclude a broadcast. Igoe noted that YouTube became an important platform for *Kimmel* and attributed the show page's billion-plus page views to its musical content. "If you come on the show, you get two songs, and occasionally, a band will do four or five songs, and we'll put that content up. We typically have a 90-day license to keep it up on the page, and the more we can the better."²⁶⁸ Thus, after the terms of the licensing agreement expire between the network, the platform, and the record label, musical performances are often pulled online. They are also frequently excised from episodes when uploaded to network-owned streaming sites like Hulu and are contingently available as fan-posted content on streaming platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, and DailyMotion. While

²⁶⁴ L.A. Ross, "How Jimmy Fallon's 'Lip Sync Battle' Launched SpikeTV's Rebrand: 'Right Swing at Right Moment,'" *The Wrap*, April 16, 2015, <http://www.thewrap.com/how-jimmy-fallons-lip-sync-battle-launched-spike-tvs-rebrand-right-swing-at-right-moment/>; Lacey Rose, "How NBC Passed on Jimmy Fallon's 'Lip Sync Battle' and Gave Spike a Hit Show," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 8, 2015. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/how-nbc-passed-jimmy-fallons-786992>

²⁶⁵ "James Corden," *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, Season 3, Episode 380, June 8, 2016.

²⁶⁶ Bryn Elise Sandberg, "CBS Formatting James Corden's 'Carpool Karaoke' for International Buyers," *Billboard*, May 23, 2016. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/7378462/cbs-james-cordens-carpool-karaoke-international-buyers>; Michael Starr, "The Secret Behind James Corden's 'Carpool Karaoke' Sensation," October 5, 2015. <http://nypost.com/2015/10/05/the-secret-behind-james-cordens-carpool-karaoke-sensation/>.

²⁶⁷ Dombal, "Late Night."

²⁶⁸ Shirley Halperin and Joe Levy, "The White-Knuckle Bookings of TV's Music Power Brokers," *Billboard* 126, no. 37 (2014): 46.

segments like “Classroom Instruments” and “Lip Sync Battle” cultivate a sense of virality and fan agency, its accessibility to audiences is tightly controlled by NBC. It also threatens to limit the range of musicians’ contributions, as “Lip Sync Battle” and “Carpool Karaoke” rely on recordings rather than live performances from the house band or musical guests. Such control is further reinforced by the networks’ unwillingness to create a more comprehensive license to protect recording artists’ musical performances beyond the standard 90-day online distribution agreement. This potentially limits viewers’ access to past live performances from television and diminishes the labor responsible for them by making them difficult to find, capture, and preserve.

These issues, in turn, raise questions about whether to remove musical segments from late-night programming altogether. James Corden’s predecessor, Craig Ferguson, rarely had musical guests on *The Late Late Show* and chose not to have a house band.²⁶⁹ Suspicion that Fallon’s successor Seth Meyers, who professed to lack “a musical vision for the show,”²⁷⁰ would do the same clouded initial reception of his program as it debuted from Studio 8G on February 24, 2014. A month after the former *SNL* head writer’s debut as *Late Night* host, *Billboard* contributor Reggie Ugwu reported that the program imposed “a formal limit of two performances per week” compared to Fallon’s four-guest weekly average as *Late Night* host. This of course spoke to the two hosts’ different assets as members of the *SNL* ensemble.²⁷¹ Though both men’s *Weekend Update* runs prepared them for *Late Night*,²⁷² Fallon demonstrated his skill with musical parody as an expression of his music fandom while Meyers shined in the writers’ room and used *Weekend Update* as a platform for political commentary.

²⁶⁹ Dombal, “Late Night.”

²⁷⁰ Terry Gross, “Seth Meyers’ ‘Late Night’ Challenge: What to Do with His Hands,” *NPR*, April 24, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/04/23/306155626/seth-meyers-late-night-challenge-what-to-do-with-his-hands>.

²⁷¹ Reggie Ugwu, “*Late Night* Tunes Out Music,” *Billboard* 126, no. 11 (2014): 4-5.

²⁷² Lane Brown, “In Conversation: Lorne Michaels.”

It is unclear whether Meyers was concerned about such criticism and whether his perceived lack of interest in music threatened *Late Night*'s legacy. But shortly before Meyers went live executive producer Lorne Michaels hired *SNL* alum Fred Armisen as the program's musical director and band leader. These responsibilities required the comedian and former punk rocker to write a new theme song, assemble a house band, and occasionally sit in as drummer and guitarist. He agreed to the terms of this arrangement, which Michaels pitched after leveraging his producer credit on Armisen's IFC sketch comedy program *Portlandia* by appealing to his friendship with Meyers and promising a flexible work schedule for the comedian. The latter point appeared to be the deciding factor for Armisen, who lives in Los Angeles, Portland, and New York,²⁷³ as the job allowed him to "put together the aesthetics [of the show] without having to be there every day."²⁷⁴ The comedian's intermittent presence at *Late Night*'s musical director made room for guests within the 8G Band's line-up. Though bassist Syd Barrett, keyboardist Eli Janney, and guitarists Marnie Stern and Seth Jabour have been consistent presences within the house band since Armisen enlisted them in 2014, several drummers fill in for Armisen, including session drummer Kim Thompson and Brann Dailor of Mastadon, as well as guitarist Annie Clark.²⁷⁵ Despite such sit-in performances serving as a promotional function,

²⁷³ Marlow Stern, "Coffee Talk With Fred Armisen," *The Daily Beast*, January 7, 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/07/coffee-talk-with-fred-armisen-on-portlandia-meeting-obama-and-taylor-swift-s-greatness.html>.

²⁷⁴ Tim Grieving, "Armisen Adds Bandleader to His Juggling Act," *Variety* 323, no. 12 (2014): 112.

²⁷⁵ Michael O'Connell, "Seth Meyers Taps Fred Armisen to Lead 'Late Night' Band with Members of Les Savy Fav, Girls Against Boys," *Billboard*, February 10, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/tv-film/5901190/seth-meyers-taps-fred-armisen-to-lead-late-night-band-with-members>; Jenn Pelly, "Watch Marnie Stern Join Fred Armisen's Band on 'Late Night With Seth Meyers,'" *Pitchfork*, March 10, 2014. <http://pitchfork.com/news/54294-watch-marnie-stern-join-fred-armisens-band-on-late-night-with-seth-meyers/>; "Mastodon's Brann Dailor is Guest Drummer on 'Seth Meyers,'" *Brooklyn Vegan*, April 5, 2016. <http://www.brooklynvegan.com/mastodon-drummer-brann-dailor-joining-seth-meyers-8g-band-this-week-carlos-d-joined-them-last-week/>; David Anthony, "St. Vincent to Fill in for Fred Armisen on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*," *The A.V. Club*, August 6, 2014. <http://www.avclub.com/article/st-vincent-fill-fred-armisen-late-night-seth-meyer-207831>.

as these appearances usually aligned with recording artists' touring schedules or capitalize upon their New York residencies, the program limited its music bookings to two guests per week.

However, by 2015 it appeared as though Meyers was re-orienting *Late Night*'s historical use of the host's personal fandom by shifting it away from music and toward his interest in personal politics and literature. He distanced himself from Fallon's viral musical moments with "A Closer Look," a *Weekend Update*-style segment on contemporary geopolitical issues that put him in league with news-oriented comedy programs like Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and TBS's *Full Frontal With Samantha Bee*.²⁷⁶ With the help of supervising producer Haleigh Raff, Meyers also began reserving third-guest spots²⁷⁷—appearances traditionally held for musical performances toward the end of the broadcast—for literary figures like novelist Marlon James and *New Yorker* editor David Remnick, who he engaged in markedly more informed and spirited conversations than many of the show's celebrity guests, regardless of such interviews' YouTube traction.²⁷⁸ But for the show's musical guests Meyers often deferred to Armisen's tastes for indie rock acts like Parquet Courts,²⁷⁹ which were more in line with the music Letterman and O'Brien favored. Though such a reading risks making illegible Armisen's Venezuelan and Japanese heritage and may overlook the diversity of its other bookings, *Late Night* now books fewer recording artists and tends to focus their attention toward indie rock, embodied by the guitar-drums-bass configuration of its house band, instead of offer more space to artists operating within different generic and performance traditions. Yet many of Meyers' competitors book more eclectic musical acts, in

²⁷⁶ Scott Timberg, "The Stars Aligned for Seth Meyers," *Salon*, June 25, 2016. http://www.salon.com/2016/06/25/the_stars_aligned_for_seth_meyers_that_was_more_dumbLuck_than_anything_else/.

²⁷⁷ Molly Eichel, "Inside Job: Haleigh Raff," *Backstage* 57, no. 11 (2016): 13.

²⁷⁸ Sophia Hollander, "Seth Meyers: The 'Late Night' Literary Salon," *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 2015, D.1.

²⁷⁹ Stern, "Coffee Talk with Fred Armisen."

part because their band leaders professionally identify with a wider range of musical genres.²⁸⁰ This includes *The Tonight Show*'s Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, who currently works with former *Today Show* booker Julie Gurovitsch after Jonathan Cohen's departure in early 2015;²⁸¹ *Late Show*'s Jon Batiste, a New Orleans-born, Julliard-trained jazz musician; and *Late Late Show*'s Reggie Watts, a deejay and beatboxer.²⁸² These examples suggest that bandleaders of color, otherwise ambivalent figures within variety programming due to its antecedents' associations with minstrelsy and compromised integration practices,²⁸³ are potential agents of change by bringing in and helping to facilitate the performances of recording artists representing a wider variety of musical styles. Thus their ability to help aid in the discovery of a wider range of musical talent across genre and identity matters. It is particularly relevant because late-night programming is otherwise dominated by white men,²⁸⁴ a fact *Late Show* guest Aziz Ansari acknowledged by calling host Stephen Colbert "the first late night host from South Carolina and the bajillionth white guy" during an interview to promote his Netflix series, *Master of None*.²⁸⁵

This chapter argues that *Late Night* functions as a space for musical discovery within NBC's long broadcast history. This is most evident in how the hosts' fan practices are often

²⁸⁰ Britt Julious, "Can Bandleaders Breathe New Life Into Late-Night TV?," *The Guardian*, December 24, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/dec/24/late-night-tv-bandleaders-the-roots-reggie-watts-fred-armisen>.

²⁸¹ Andrew Hampp, "'Today' Show Booker Julie Gurovitsch Heading to 'Tonight Show,'" *Billboard*, March 9, 2015. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/today-show-booker-julie-gurovitsch-780095>.

²⁸² Nate Chinen, "Leading the Band in a Style He Sees Fit," *New York Times*, September 8, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/arts/music/jon-batiste-will-lead-the-late-show-with-stephen-colbert-band-in-a-style-he-sees-fit.html?_r=0; Lucas Kavner, "Reggie Watts on His New Gig as Bandleader of *The Late Late Show* and Why He Was Annoyed by the Offer," *Vulture*, March 23, 2015. <http://www.vulture.com/2015/03/reggie-watts-late-late-show-bandleader.html>.

²⁸³ Forman, *One Night on TV*.

²⁸⁴ Rob Sheffield, "How Late-Night TV's New MVPs Are Reinventing the Talk Show," *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/features/how-late-night-tvs-new-mvps-are-reinventing-the-talk-show-20160505>; W. Kamau Bell, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Late Night," *Buzzfeed*, September 11, 2014. https://www.buzzfeed.com/wkamaubell/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-late-night?utm_term=.waQVymprkA#.dcE14avdGB; Breeanna O'Hare, "Once More, With Feeling: Where are the Women in Late-Night TV," *CNN*, April 10, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/10/showbiz/tv/late-night-tv-hosts-women/>.

²⁸⁵ Olivia Armstrong, "Aziz Ansari Calls out Whiteness of Late Night and Flusters Stephen Colbert," *Decider*, November 11, 2015. <http://decider.com/2015/11/11/aziz-ansari-the-late-show-with-stephen-colbert-diversity/>.

integrated into the show to ascribe value to musicians' labor as performers. *Late Night's* hosts often do the work of synchronizing musicians with NBC and the wider late-night landscape through championing music that frequently reflects their own tastes on air, and through coordinating talent with band leaders and bookers backstage. While such gestures attempt to centralize live music as a key part of late-night programming, *Late Night's* musical guests are often relegated to the final ten minutes of a broadcast. Thus these performances are inconsequential to NBC, which does not count them toward the show's ratings or uniformly coordinate with labels and publishers to assure their preservation on network-affiliated Web platforms. Yet they are integral to *Late Night's* staff, who often bring on musicians they like. In addition, the hosts' fan practices are unevenly distributed across musical genres. Throughout its history *Late Night's* hosts have identified most strongly with hegemonically white musical genres like indie and alternative rock and have struggled to provide equal consideration for artists of color and the genres in which they work. The gradual presence of such musicians offers the potential to chip away at late-night television's broader hegemonic whiteness, though such representation has been unevenly prioritized in *Late Night's* history. Yet while *Late Night* struggles to embrace racial difference through live performance, the next chapter demonstrates that indie rock's assumed masculine address is subject to debate by exploring how female musicians identify with the genre both as performers and as music supervisors.

Chapter Three

A Good Song and a Good Scene: Supervising Girlhood for *Awkward*.

The responsibilities and boundaries of music supervision have historically been difficult to explain, even and often especially for the musicians whose work is used as fodder to help define a media property's aesthetic sensibility. In a promotional featurette for MTV's *Awkward*. (2011-2016), a scripted teen dramedy that filters high school's social misadventures through the sardonic critical lens of deadpan protagonist and blogger Jenna Hamilton (Ashley Rickards), Best Coast frontwoman Bethany Cosentino demonstrated this confusion by admitting that before signing on to help supervise the season two episode "Once Upon a Blog" in 2012, she was aware "that it was someone's job to pick music for TV and film and stuff. I guess I just didn't really think of it as, like, an actual profession. I just thought it [was] like, 'oh it's just this cool thing where you get to pick songs, like your favorite songs.'"¹ However, working on *Awkward* taught her that "it's not just about picking some random song that you like. It's like, you have to blend these two things [the song's aural register and the scene's visual language] together," an experience that ultimately required Cosentino to privilege exposition, dialogue, tone, and other formal elements of narrative storytelling when choosing songs for the episode.²

Such comments echoed the experiences that Tegan and Sara recounted a year later when they agreed to supervise an episode for the show's third season. By that point in their career, the Canadian sister act were indie rock veterans whose music was placed in several cable and network programs. Yet as Sara Quin observed in an interview with MTV, "The thing that's been really interesting about having your music placed is that you have really very little say in, like,

¹ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor," *MTV*, September 12, 2012. <http://www.mtv.com/videos/misc/834880/awkward-bethany-cosentino-of-best-coast-guest-music-supervisor.jhtml>.

² *Ibid.*

where or how it's used. So this is a really cool opportunity to see what it's like to be on the other side of it."³ In other words, their music had been used to establish or heighten many programs' dramatic qualities and thematic directives throughout the 2000s. In particular, their music was associated with individual programs' representation of young queer and female characters due to the pair's identification with feminism and lesbianism. According to Sara Quin, such experiences led to them "really seeing the profound impact that a good song and a good scene can really change a band."⁴ Yet as musicians they frequently did not control how their music was integrated into television storytelling—what songs would be used, in what context, and to what extent or duration—and how their work would be received through mediation. So they took to the task to supervise *Awkward*'s "Indecent Exposure." As Tegan Quin put it, "I took it very seriously. I set up a little home office in the kitchen. Every time my girlfriend walked by, I was like, [affects a solemn voice] 'Please. I'm supervising right now. I'm really busy.'"⁵

Cosentino's and the Quin sisters' initial participation with *Awkward* had little to do with their own knowledge or experience with music supervision beyond allowing (or, perhaps more accurately, having their label representatives allow) their recordings to be licensed for television shows as needle drops, an industry term that metaphorizes the use of phonographic technology to describe the integration of recorded music into television. In addition, their involvement obscured the music department, including MTV's in-house supervisor Ben Hochstein; music coordinator Jamie Dooner, who handles the program's music budget and aids Hochstein; composer Brad Breeck; and Randy Dolnick, who heads up MTV's Music & Media Licensing department. The department's work was overseen by executive Rochelle Holguin, MTV, VH1,

³ "Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors," *MTV*, May 7, 2013. <http://www.mtv.com/video-clips/52ue4t/awkward-tegan-and-sara-guest-music-supervisors>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

and Logo's head of creative music integration for programming, promotion, and distribution in order to "present music to our audience" in multiple ways.⁶ Holguin invited Cosentino and the Quin sisters to work on *Awkward* and helped negotiate the terms by which they—and their recordings—would be brought into the show's production during seasons two and three.⁷ This obscuring was intentional, as MTV has frequently enlisted recording artists to collaborate on their original scripted and reality programming in various capacities. In recent years, such efforts have often been legible in the channel's decision to promote items on its schedule by inviting recording artists to serve as guest music supervisors. The channel began this practice in 2006 when Dashboard Confessional frontman Chris Carrabba supervised an episode of reality teen drama *Laguna Beach*.⁸ This decision was meant to capitalize upon Carrabba's associations with emo, a popular rock subgenre at the time that was characterized by outsize expressive vocal, lyrical, and instrumental qualities that could mirror and heighten the idyllic locales, romantic entanglements, and melodramatic tendencies of its privileged Southern California-based young cast. MTV's programming and marketing teams devised several similar initiatives in the intervening years, including bringing on Miguel to supervise an installment of *Washington Heights*, a documentary series about a friend group of Dominican New Yorkers with aspirations of stardom that mirrored the R&B singer's ethnicity and origin story.⁹ Similarly, in 2011 Nathan Williams of the San Diego-based surf rock outfit Wavves was tapped by Joe Cuello, then the

⁶ Urmila Ramakrishnan, "MTV Does TMI (Targeted Music Integration)," *Hispanic Executive*, January 1, 2015. <http://hispanicexecutive.com/2015/viacom-3/>.

⁷ Rochelle Holguin, "Shaping Brand Identity: Creating Music for Brands." SXSW 2016 Conference. March 18, 2016.

⁸ "Dashboard's Carrabba Drives 'Laguna Beach' Tunes," *Billboard*, September 26, 2006. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/57095/dashboards-carrabba-drives-laguna-beach-tunes>; Brian Garrity, "Stars Select Shows' Songs," *Billboard*, 118, no. 40 (2006): 8.

⁹ Philiana Ng, "Miguel Serving as Guest Music Supervisor on MTV Reality Series," *Billboard*, January 31, 2013. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/branding/1537506/miguel-serving-as-guest-music-supervisor-on-mtv-reality-series>.

channel's senior vice president of creative music integration, to serve as a guest composer on *I Just Want My Pants Back*. The short-lived sitcom about a group of post-collegiate Brooklyn hipsters was a way for the channel to beef up its scripted content following a dip in ratings after eating off the returns from their reality programming for nearly a decade and having to compete with other cable channels' critical and ratings success in drama and comedy.¹⁰ A notable benefit of these collaborations was the opportunity for recording industry participants to promote their music. Such decisions demonstrate how MTV has historically sought to maximize its associations with musicians by developing various opportunities for cross promotion long after the channel abandoned its original business model as an exhibitor of popular music videos.

MTV also made a clear effort to synchronize these musicians with their programs' fans and perceived audiences, which tended to be organized around gender. Thus this chapter investigates how *Awkward*'s soundtrack and its generic and industrial associations with women's contributions to indie rock and electronic music reflected MTV's strategy to appeal to young women. In so doing, it first explores the channel's various attempts to integrate musicians' labor into its original programming historically in order to contextualize the channel's efforts to develop scripted content in the early 2010s when *Awkward* was pitched and ordered to series. It then draws upon two case studies from the show's second and third seasons in order to interrogate the channel's attempts to foster relationships with female television and music professionals like creator/showrunner Lauren Iungerich alongside indie rock artists like Bethany Cosentino and the Quin sisters. It does so to argue that their contingent labor reflects the channel's ambivalent relationship with young women, as well as how the use of "indie" to shade in girls' subjectivity relies upon undervalued labor and normative definitions of femininity.

¹⁰ Phil Gallo, "MTV Making Wavves," *Billboard*. 123, no. 31 (2011): 35.

A Really Intense Mixtape

In a promotional interview released on MTV's Web site to coincide with the broadcast of *Awkward*'s second season episode "Once Upon a Blog," Best Coast frontwoman Bethany Cosentino likened supervision to "making a really intense mixtape."¹¹ Such comparisons demonstrate multiple aspects of supervision's industrial and cultural functions. First, it centralizes supervision's relationship to music fandom by using curation to manifest forms of material productivity as both an expression of taste and affinity toward certain artists and genres, as well as specialized knowledge through demonstrating fluency and minutiae related to particular texts or practices. Second, it nods to the connections that supervisors are often asked to develop between works of narrative fiction and recordings in order to enhance a property's thematic elements and visual language. Third, it gestures toward the profession's reliance upon other musicians' work for storytelling purposes that appeal to specific audiences, which indicates supervision's commercial directives, as well as feeds the assumption that supervision is not a creative talent. Finally, it obscures the legal and economic dimensions of the profession which includes responsibilities like haggling on the price point for licensing fees with publishers and record labels, unearthing appropriate cues and incidental music from libraries to offset expenses, and stretching a music budget that tends to comprise up to and often far less than ten percent of a program's total cost across a suite of broadcasting and streaming services.¹²

Thus to understand *Awkward*'s music supervision strategies, the profession must be traced back to its cinematic origins, which influence its integration into post-network television. This served to legitimate the medium, serial programming, and supposedly disreputable

¹¹ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

¹² Jonny Coleman, "Does Hollywood Understand Why Music Supervision Is?," *L.A. Weekly*, September 18, 2015. <http://www.laweekly.com/music/does-hollywood-understand-what-music-supervision-is-6046842>.

audiences, which inform the derisive cultural perception of MTV as a youth-oriented cable network, teen soaps as a genre, and young women as viewers. *Awkward* exploits women's participation in indie rock to represent the subjectivity of the program's protagonist, Jenna, a smart, sexually curious high school student who narrates episodes as entries from her personal blog. The program's enlistment of Best Coast and Tegan and Sara as guest supervisors reinforces such appeals and demonstrates musicians' status as for-hire industry professionals. But in order to map the field's historical involvement with narrative film and television, we must first endeavor to resolve what supervisors actually do. In an interview with film scholar Jeff Smith, veteran supervisor Margot Core intimated that many of the filmmakers she worked with thought of her "as little more than a clerk or administrative assistant, whose only task was to fulfill their will regarding the kind of music that appears in the film."¹³ Such attitudes contribute to the historical perception that supervision is a nebulous, inconsequential below-the-line profession whose practitioners "don't exactly *create* anything," at least according to *Variety*'s Steve Chagollan.¹⁴ Smith's definition of the field challenges such a position. He describes supervisors as professionals who coordinate the administrative and creative responsibilities of compiling soundtracks by "creating a song's overall concept by taking part in scoring sessions, negotiating licensing arrangements, and in some cases, even organizing 'casting calls' for songwriters and performers."¹⁵ Similarly, Natalie Lewandowski's analysis of supervisors' contributions to the Australian film industry highlights their constant negotiation between multiple industries, their interaction with talent related to those sectors, their fluency in popular music and publishing

¹³ Jeff Smith, "Taking Music Supervisors Seriously," in *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack*, ed. Philip Brophy (North Ryde NSW, AU: Southwest Press, 2001): 125.

¹⁴ Steve Chagollan, "Add a Song, Make a Movie," *New York Times*, February 27, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/movies/music-supervisors-in-film-see-more-recognition.html?_r=0.

¹⁵ Jeff Smith, "Popular Songs and Comic Allusion in Contemporary Cinema," in *Soundtrack Available: Essays in Film and Popular Music*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 412-413.

rights, and their authority over song selection.¹⁶ She notes that supervisors often oversee scoring for particular scenes, re-recordings of previously released tracks, and placements with no changes to the original recording.¹⁷ They also work as freelancers, licensing company employees who specialize in particular genres, and label or publishing house representatives.¹⁸

Despite Smith and Lewandowski's clarifications, supervisors' contributions are often misunderstood or ignored within the media industries. Much of this confusion stems from the term's shifting definitions, which Smith claims roughly originated in the late 1930s and applied to individuals hired by film executives to pull source music from studio libraries.¹⁹ Similar practices began to be put in place for television by the 1960s, though supervision was still primarily associated with film production for the next three decades. The responsibilities of the profession expanded, yet were often contingent upon the needs of individual cinematic projects. By the end of the 1960s and through the next decade, supervisors' responsibilities increasingly mirrored booking agents' and artists and repertoire representatives' work. When composer John Barry signed on to John Schlesinger's 1969 feature *Midnight Cowboy*, he produced the film's score as well as assembled musicians and helped clear soundtrack music.²⁰ This emphasis on pop soundtracks only intensified in subsequent decades. Anahid Kassabian identifies pop music's unique quality to inform characters' environments and signify their emotional state within those settings through a piece of music's lyrical content or tonal quality, noting that audiences' associations with particular recordings allow music to become "one of the major tools Hollywood films use to track identifications."²¹ Smith observes that "contemporary cinema is

¹⁶ Natalie Lewandowski, "Understanding Creative Roles in Entertainment: The Music Supervisor as Case Study," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 865-875.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 868.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 869.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

marked by a more general tendency to use pop songs as a resource for humorous allusions, one that comments on the situations depicted in a film either through its lyrical content or through an extramusical system of pop culture references.”²² Ben Aslinger also notes that pop music’s presence in medical melodramas like *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Nip/Tuck* engenders suspense in viewers and plays on cinematic traditions of using scored montages for economical storytelling.²³ Such devices work with other aspects of a narrative’s formal design, including credits sequences, transitions, and musical performances, as Aslinger demonstrates in his research on popular music’s queer address in 90s-era teen melodramas.²⁴ Aslinger claims that licensing motivated supervisors “to include genres and artists previously marginalized in the music industry and to add sonic layers complicating textual readings of gender and sexuality” on programs like *Dawson’s Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.²⁵ These shows associated queer characters with queer- or feminist-identified riot grrrl, indie rock, and electronic musicians to accompany narrative arcs around coming out, homophobia, and romance. Showtime made similar appeals with gay- and lesbian-oriented dramas like *Queer as Folk* and *The L-Word*.²⁶ So did HBO’s *Looking* (2013-2016), which enlisted supervisor Liza Richardson to weave past disco and pop hits, modern rock’s queer entries, and contemporary dance music as a shorthand for gay male subjectivity within a Bay Area-based friend group. But music’s integration also indicates the financial restraints certain productions must negotiate in order to effectively represent a specific group or environment. In his analysis of supervision and scoring practices within New

²² Benjamin S. Aslinger, “Rocking Prime Time: Gender, the WB, and Teen Culture” in *Teen Television: Essays On Programming and Fandom*, eds. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2008): 408.

²³ Aslinger, “Aural Appearances: Popular Music, Televisuality, and Technology” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008).

²⁴ Aslinger, “Rocking Prime Time.”

²⁵ Aslinger, “Rocking Prime Time.” 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-91.

Queer Cinema—a 90s-era experimental film movement meant to represent the concerns of gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities—Jack Curtis Dubowsky updates the “project triangle,” a term that refers to filmmakers’ inability to have a good, fast, and cheap product and therefore must prioritize two of those attributes at the expense of the third. He claims that cachet, budget, and effectiveness limit musical decisions.²⁷ In addition to budget, cachet refers to “a quality of membership in, knowledge of, or significant resonance with a target audience or subculture,” while effectiveness “relates to music’s resonance with a particular film” as “a subjective measure of reaction to picture or narrative cuing” toward characters, plot, and setting.²⁸

Despite budgetary restrictions, certain supervisors efforts increasingly became noticed within the television industry through supervisors’ contributions to network and cable serial melodramas during the 2000s. Tim Anderson connects their rise to “the reassertion of the role of publishing in the music industry, the change of what it means to be a ‘record label,’ and the strategic need for media branding in a new media environment,”²⁹ transforming “the once lowly position of the music supervisor . . . into a sometimes above-the-line consideration.”³⁰ Indeed, a handful of supervisors—particularly Liza Richardson and Alexandra Patsavas—were identified by their supposedly curatorial approach to creating rock-oriented soundtracks, as well as their relationships with television producers like Jason Katims, Josh Schwartz, and Shonda Rhimes.³¹ Patsavas was credited with producing “*The O.C.* effect,” an industrial term describing the

²⁷ Jack Curtis Dubowsky, “Musical Cachet in New Queer Cinema,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 8, no. 1 (2014): 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 28-32.

²⁹ Tim J. Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹ Jon Burlingame, “Spinmeister Richardson Lives for the Moment,” *Variety* 387, no. 10 (2002): 4A; Roy Trakin, “Alexandra Patsavas, Music Supervisor,” *Advertising Age* 77, no. 20 (2006): S9; Katie Hasty, “Alexandra Patsavas,” *Billboard* 118, no. 46 (2006): 20; Monica Corcoran, “Oscar Deejay Hopes to Fill Musical Chairs,” *Variety* 406, 1 (2007): 4; Steffie Nelson, “Liza Richardson: Tantalizing Taste for Soundtracks (Women’s Impact Report: Below the Liners),” *Variety* 308, no. 62 (2010): A37.

commercial ascendance of once-obscure indie bands like Death Cab for Cutie after she helped place them on FOX's teen soap opera.³² Much of Patsavas' identity was bound up in her purported ability to discover talent through song placement by "find[ing] the very best song that will enhance the story. The job's not necessarily going to go to the best-looking band, or to a musician in a certain age group. Often, when a song hits, it hits because it was tied to a scene that fans liked."³³ Richardson's supervision career succeeded and overlapped with her success as a radio deejay. She was able to capitalize upon the mutually beneficial relationship between supervision and radio programming—fields where professionals tend to distinguish themselves by "breaking" new talent—by hosting a weekly show on Santa Monica-based station KCRW.³⁴ However, such distinctions are rare and unevenly applied to supervisors.

Nonetheless, music helps construct perceptions of authenticity. In his analysis of *Mad Men*, Anderson observes that the show's music department harnessed period-appropriate and occasionally pointedly anachronistic pop standards, rock, R&B, and hip-hop to comment upon thematic concerns, illuminate characters' storylines, and cultivate the perception that this primetime melodrama opened a window into the "real" 1960s.³⁵ But music placement is also frequently used for branding purposes, resulting in a tension between what Leslie M. Meier identifies as "the emergence of a cultural and economic condition marked by ubiquitous or ambient media whose *content* may be cultural, but whose *intent* is promotional."³⁶ Meier builds

³² Maya Kroth, "The O.C. Effect: Indie-Rock Rags to Riches," *The Stranger*, November 3, 2005. <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/the-oc-effect/Content?oid=24887>; Faye Woods, "Storytelling in Song: Television Music, Narrative, and Allusion in 'The O.C.," in *Television Aesthetics and Style*, eds. Jason Jacobs and Steven Peacock (London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 199-208.

³³ Dave Good, "Why Is There So Much Indie Rock on Television?," *L.A. Weekly*, November 13, 2012. <http://www.laweekly.com/music/why-is-there-so-much-indie-rock-on-television-2405006>.

³⁴ Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*.

³⁵ Anderson "Uneasy Listening."

³⁶ Leslie M. Meier, "Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: Recording Artists, Brands, and 'Rendering Authenticity,'" *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 4 (2011): 400.

on Kassabian's concept of "ubiquitous musics" to describe music "deployed for the express purpose of corporate branding as well as those deployed perhaps in a less strategic manner, but which have a branding effect nevertheless."³⁷ This resembles Sarah Banet-Weiser's definition of authenticity as a "cultural process . . . that marks the transformation of everyday, lived culture to brand culture"³⁸ through narrative clusters that make visible a host of cultural ambivalences that play upon articulations of self-fashioning and identity formation. Meier observes that such pursuit of authenticity prioritizes difference and novelty across musical genres to develop an affective bond with consumers to various products, thus contributing to "the instability of promotional ubiquitous musics' value,"³⁹ which informs *Awkward's* supervision practices.

Meier approaches the concept of authenticity with some reservation.⁴⁰ Indeed, authenticity is a difficult word for many scholars to define, particularly in relation to recording industry labor and music fandom, where discourses around "selling out" and binaristic distinctions between art and commerce have larger histories of circulation and debate.⁴¹ Yet oftentimes the artistic merit of particular genres and performers associated with them are legitimated in gendered terms. Norma Coates observes that pop stars are vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity due to pop's perceived illegitimacy as a mass produced and connotatively feminine genre.⁴² Such perceptions also inform many rock musicians and critics' reservations toward MTV in its early years.⁴³ They believed that music video and a cable channel

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sarah Banet-Weiser. *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

³⁹ Meier, "Promotional Ubiquitous Musics," 410.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992): 50-68.

⁴² Norma J. Coates, "Filling in Holes: Television Music as a Recuperation of Popular Music on Television," *Music Sound and the Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (2002): 21-25.

⁴³ Craig Marks and Rob Tannenbaum, *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* (New York: Plume, 2011).

centered on it was a transparently commercial medium that prioritized aesthetic flash, devalued traditional professional obligations like recording and touring, and appealed to “superficial” fan practices like hero worship over more “meaningful” engagement with rock’s integrity as a popular and connotatively masculine art form.⁴⁴ Such perceptions persisted as the channel prioritized reality and lifestyle programming, even though R. Serge Denisoff notes that MTV diversified its programming after Viacom’s acquired the network in 1984.⁴⁵

Michael Newman’s observations about the commercial appropriation of indie rock in American cinema and advertising during the late 1990s and the recalibration of “selling out” within the recording industry help contextualize *Awkward*’s generic identification with indie rock.⁴⁶ Newman classifies indie as a sensibility that encompasses “an oppositional formation of outsiders that sees itself as the solution to an excessively homogenized, commercialized media, and on the other hand a form of expression that is itself commercial and that also serves to promote the interests of a class of sophisticated consumers.”⁴⁷ The motives behind such professional maneuvering are often far more precarious and complicated when recording artists make themselves amenable to music supervision’s financial realities. In an interview with *The A.V. Club*, Liza Richardson argued that indie musicians are willing to forego smaller licensing fees because of the possibility that the right sync could raise their profile, noting that if a production pays \$2,000 to license a song by an unknown band, “by the time that gets divided up [between individual band members as well as additional personnel like producers and managers], it’s not that much money going to the artist. A couple hundred bucks isn’t incentive, but if an

⁴⁴ Lisa A. Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Kembrew McLeod, “Between Rock and a Hard Place: Gender and Rock Criticism,” in *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. Steve Jones (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002): 95-113.

⁴⁵ R. Serge Denisoff, *Inside MTV* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988).

⁴⁶ Michael Z. Newman, “Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative,” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 16-34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

indie artist is getting Shazamed a lot, that can be huge for them.”⁴⁸ Such labor conditions require lesser-known acts to initially undervalue their work for the chance of exposure, which may be allow them to negotiate for a higher licensing fee or use syncs as leverage in other ways. These expectations are created, in part, by music supervisors who are required to license multiple cues within frequently tight production budgets and play upon artists’ hope that they can build a career for themselves one Shazam at a time, however unrealistic those expectations may actually be. Finally, supervision’s practice of undervaluing labor is further complicated by *Awkward’s* reliance upon female musicians, who are often culturally devalued within the music industries.

Finally, “indie” is often gendered feminine in problematic terms. Tony Grajeda observes that all-male indie rock bands like Pavement and Guided By Voices received negative feedback from rock critics in the mid-1990s for their use of lo-fi recording techniques—typified by the use of analog equipment, amateur or “bad” production aesthetics, and makeshift home studios in bedrooms and kitchens—contributed to what he refers to as “the feminization of lo-fi.”⁴⁹ In particular, the emphasis on home recording contributed to critical disdain, which Grajeda interprets as a defensive reaction against domestic space “as a private, feminine sphere. The bedroom—our trusted guarantee for reproduction—has become instead (or perhaps once again) a site of cultural production, inverting as well the gendered coding of consumption and mass culture as ‘merely’ feminine.”⁵⁰ Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber note that such associations between the private sphere and femininity have also worked to discredit women and girls’ participation within rock subculture, as they note that young women’s fandom is often contained

⁴⁸ Joshua Alston, “*The Leftovers’* Music Supervisor Runs down the Songs in Season Two’s Celestial Jukebox,” *The A.V. Club*, December 10, 2015. <http://www.avclub.com/article/leftovers-music-supervisor-runs-down-songs-season-229507>.

⁴⁹ Tony Grajeda, “The ‘Feminization’ of Rock,” in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformation in Popular Music Culture*, eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 241.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

by domestic spaces like bedrooms, removed from public life, and perceived as fickle consumerism relative to their male peers' supposedly more "authentic" engagement.⁵¹ Such devaluation also threatens to undermine women's participation as workers. Whereas the primarily male indie and alternative rock bands that David Letterman and Conan O'Brien championed as *Late Night's* hosts got to demonstrate their musicianship on stage in Rockefeller Plaza as a part of the public sphere, the primarily female musical acts associated with *Awkward* are associated with the domestic realm in multiple ways. First, they are textually associated with sites of feminine leisure because these needle drops often accompany Jenna's bedroom dwelling as she talks on the phone, retreats from high school's stressful interpersonal dynamics, and maintains her blog. In addition, the soundtrack's interaction with Jenna's episodic voiceover narration as a sonic referent to her blogging, links music by female artists to girls' use of the written (or typed) word as an essential component of their identity formation.⁵² Third, the bedroom as a discursive feminine space often reflects the songs' production contexts, as many of the cues that the Quin sisters use in particular were self-produced demos by unsigned artists who relied upon easy-to-use digital recording and editing software and uploaded their work to streaming services like Bandcamp without label representation. Finally, Tegan Quin's teasing admonishment of her girlfriend as she was selecting cues from the episode suggest that much of the guest supervision work on these two episodes relied upon portable domestic technologies like laptops and was done from home. This chapter does not seek to devalue *Awkward's* associations with domestic space so much as it does to recognize these realms being important, and often easily dismissed, sites of women and girls' labor. Such practices align with McRobbie's

⁵¹ Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," *Feminism and Youth Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 13.

⁵² Jessalynn Keller, *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Garber's, and Kandy James' claims that girls' bedrooms are complex spaces where girls consume and circulate media,⁵³ as well as Mary Celeste Kearney's assertions that bedrooms also function as thriving sites for girls and young women's own media production.⁵⁴ Rather, they acknowledge the production contexts of many of the female indie rock and electronic artists whose work was used on *Awkward* to deepen the representation of the protagonist's interior life.

Consideration must also be paid to indie musicians' entrepreneurship in relation to other media industry sectors as well. Anderson observes that "the role of the music supervisor has become something of a celebrity role with celebrities themselves sometimes taking the position."⁵⁵ In this climate, recording artists do not just contribute to a television program's narrative and formal design as soundtrack fodder. They have also been commissioned to serve as supervisors. Throughout the 1990s, a number of film productions enlisted musicians as supervisors and music directors. Such partnerships were intended to replicate the market success of the blockbuster soundtracks for films like *Saturday Night Fever* and the *Batman* franchise by synchronizing an artist's potential generic affiliations with a project and its intended audience. In 1995, R&B producer Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds did for Arista Records' soundtrack to the all-female ensemble drama *Waiting to Exhale*, which featured original material from Mary J. Blige, Brandy, and star Whitney Houston that was written or co-written by Edmonds.⁵⁶ Such collaborations also exploited synergistic opportunities between record labels and film studios that were owned by the same corporate parent or acquired through conglomeration, like when

⁵³ Kandy James, "'I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!': The Bedroom as a Leisure Site for Adolescent Girls," *Journal of Leisure Research* 33, no. 1 (2001): 71-90; Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*, ed. Angela McRobbie (New York: Routledge, 2000): 12-25.

⁵⁴ Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*, 123.

⁵⁶ Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*, 211.

Interscope Records and Warner Bros. enlisted Nine Inch Nails' frontman Trent Reznor to curate the alternative rock soundtrack to Oliver Stone's 1994 film *Natural Born Killers*.⁵⁷

Television has also capitalized upon recording industry talent's marquee presence. MTV has consistently drawn upon such relations. Emo singer-songwriter Chris Carrabba served as a guest music supervisor for a 2006 episode of MTV's teen reality melodrama *Laguna Beach*, which allowed the network to license some of his songs to other episodes as promotion.⁵⁸ A number of recording artists serving as guest supervisors for MTV's original programming, including members of pop-punk outfits Blink-182 and Fall Out Boy for *Laguna Beach* and *The Hills*, and R&B singer Miguel for *Washington Heights*. But in his analysis of Carrabba's work on *Laguna Beach*, Anderson notes that the majority of Carrabba's selections were left out of the episode because of the channel's requirement that its programming executives give final approval on its musical decisions.⁵⁹ Such struggles for recognition and authority reinforce that while some music supervisors have acquired celebrity cache in certain circles for their contributions in shaping the aural aesthetic and marketability of certain projects, a number of professionals in this field work in relative anonymity. They also reinforce how supervision "is an outcome of diversification of musical creativity"⁶⁰ whose practitioners' struggles for agency run roughshod with recordings' existence as objects that are "woven together by numerous stakeholders and even other properties, each of which demand legal and financial attention."⁶¹

Importantly, music supervisors' work is shaped by questions of identity and the ways in which labor's industrial and cultural value is informed by the intersection of race, gender, and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁶⁰ Lewandowski, "Understanding Creative Roles in Entertainment," 868.

⁶¹ Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy*, 129.

sexuality. *Awkward*'s implementation of Cosentino and the Quin sisters coincides with third-wave feminism's cultural moment at the end of the twentieth century, which McRobbie defines as post-feminist, or the cultural practice of taking feminism into account.⁶² Thus, it is worth noting how the twining of hipster culture and post-feminism rose along with the mainstreaming of indie culture influenced *Awkward*. In her analysis of director Sofia Coppola's star text Caitlin Yunuen Lewis uses "cool post-feminism" to describe a cultural phenomenon where articulations of "white femininity's ideals have become ironic and marketable."⁶³ This applies to women's participation in the commodification of indie rock. Sara Cohen and Holly Kruse recognize women's integral contributions to indie rock's economy in the United States and Great Britain, and challenge their marginal status as fans, musicians, and entrepreneurs.⁶⁴ Such claims challenge the dominant critical perception that riot grrrl, an explicitly feminist musical movement during the late 1980s and early 1990s that influences new generations of female artists, exists purely as an extension of and reaction to masculinist punk, indie, and hardcore scenes.⁶⁵ In addition, Gayle Wald notes that female rock stars like Gwen Stefani benefitted from the mainstream incorporation of riot grrrl and its critical reclamation of girlhood, which privileged white definitions of femininity. This positioned girlishness "as a mode of culturally voiced resistance to patriarchal femininity, as a token of a sort of 'gestural feminism.'"⁶⁶ This

⁶² Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

⁶³ Caitlin Yunuen Lewis, "Cool Post-Feminism: The Stardom of Sofia Coppola," in *In the Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, eds. Su Holmes and Diane Negra (New York: Continuum, 2011): 195.

⁶⁴ Sara Cohen, "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997): 17-36; Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth," in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformation in Popular Music Culture*, eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 193.

informs the utilization of Best Coast and Tegan and Sara's cache as supervisors. Their selection mirrors Anderson's claim that certain supervisors are granted above-the-line status because of their name recognition within the field and the influence it buys them. Cosentino and the Quin sisters were largely brought in by Holguin to supervise in a promotional capacity and were removed from *Awkward*'s immediate production context because they were heavily licensed female recording artists with valuable brand recognition that elevated them from their peers who had new albums to promote. This allowed them to harness seriality to roll out multiple singles on MTV over the course of a season through licensing in a manner similar to the cable channel's strategic use of video rotation in the 1980s and 90s. It also required them to find other female artists willing to license their music to *Awkward* for the somewhat hollow "opportunity" of exposure, aided by the channel's decision to include chyrons highlighting the placement and promoting the channel's Web site as a commercial space to access the music featured in the episodes but with little more to offer it licensors beyond the "promise" that MTV's viewers would listen. But in order to understand such professional relationships, attention must be paid toward MTV's shift away from music programming toward scripted and reality television.

What About the "Music"?

MTV declared itself as the home of music video for U.S. cable broadcasting when the channel first launched in 1981. At the time, music videos seemed to inhabit the promise of postmodern sensibilities reaching a mass audience through the medium's fragmentation of narrative and its textual decentering. To confirm their status as commodities, music videos were always accompanied with lower-third credits for artist, song title, album title, and record label. By November 1992, MTV began crediting directors in the music videos as well.⁶⁷ Similar

⁶⁷ Stephen M. Deusner, "Direct to Video," *Pitchfork*, October 3, 2005. <http://pitchfork.com/features/article/6158-direct-to-video/>.

practices began to inform other aspects of MTV's programming. Starting at the tail end of the 1990s, programs began crediting music included in particular episodes by using crawls at the bottom of the screen that also directed viewers toward the channel's newly launched Web site to find more information on the featured artists and download digital copies of the songs at cost through parent company Viacom's licensing agreement with various record labels. Such developments would evolve into initiatives like MTV Overdrive, a broadband-based content service provider for the channel to funnel surplus content and supplemental clips of news, music, and scripted programming in anticipation of digital streaming and Web-based televisions screening practices.⁶⁸ MTV also began to use block programming as a way to build viewer awareness and loyalty for its original content. First it was used to organize music videos by genre to maximize viewership⁶⁹ before being applied to original programming. *Beavis and Butthead* originally premiered as part of *Liquid Television*, a weekly short-form animation program.⁷⁰ In March 1997, MTV launched "The 10 Spot," a weekly primetime block originally centered around *Daria* and *Singled Out* host Jenny McCarthy's short-lived variety show. It would later include *Sifl and Olly*, a puppet show that allowed the channel to capitalize on indie musician Liam Lynch's involvement while saving money on its low production costs.⁷¹

While this shift greatly transformed how music videos were exhibited and distributed, and eventually gave way to MTV's prioritization of original reality and narrative programming, it still frequently called upon the integration of recording industry labor. This is of a piece with how MTV has historically sought to develop a variety of conduits between musicians and fans in

⁶⁸ Mike Shields, "MTV Goes Into Overdrive," *Mediaweek* 15, no. 15 (2005): 12.

⁶⁹ Melinda Newman, "MTV Making a Splash With New Block Programming," *Billboard* 103, no. 25 (1991): 32.

⁷⁰ Mark Hudis, "Heh-heh. Heh-heh. That's Cool," *Media Week* 3, no. 31 (1993): 15.

⁷¹ Karen Benezra, "MTV Off-Net with 'Spot,'" *Brandweek* 38, no. 9 (1997): 5; John M. Higgins, "MTV Stuffs a Sock In It," *Broadcasting & Cable* 128, no. 44 (1998): 50.

order to commodify pop stardom and youth culture through music's mediation as the cornerstone of its brand. Yet increasingly during the 1990s, in addition to being the subject of a program or segment or a guest at an award show or weekly program recording artists' presence was felt on MTV by providing the soundtrack for its reality and scripted content. For example, upon the release of a list of pilots in development for 1998—which included 20 titles encompassing a range of documentary, scripted, and variety fare—newly minted executive vice president of programming Brian Graden explained to *Broadcasting & Cable* that the slate “reflects MTV’s programming priorities to make music an integral part of everything we do, revolutionize the presentation of music videos, and continually showcase new artists and new styles.”⁷² Graden’s position was new for the channel, but influenced by his development work at FOX as well as his experience as an executive producer for Comedy Central’s breakout hit *South Park*. As MTV president’s Judy McGrath explained to *Variety*, “[i]t’s not just about music—we’re not radio. We needed someone with a strong and varied TV background who has music in his blood.”⁷³ In particular, Graden focused his attention on “the 10 Spot,” which enjoyed incremental ratings growth during each quarter of 1998 and a 0.7 Nielsen rating in prime time by November.⁷⁴

This was perceived as a way to centralize MTV’s increasingly fragmented relationship between pop, music video, and original programming. At the time, infusing timely music cues into original programs seemed an easy way for the channel to give synergistic opportunism the veneer of edge. Such directives had been imposed on absurdist sketch comedy program *The State*, which frequently included skits about music celebrities like Guns ‘N’ Roses’ lead guitarist Slash because the channel “wanted us to do material that was referential to MTV, [grunge], rock

⁷² Donna Petrozzello, “Music Instrumental in MTV Pilots,” *Broadcasting & Cable* 128, no. 7 (1998): 36.

⁷³ Jennifer Nix, “MTV’s Graden on an Upward Curve,” *Variety* 367, no. 7 (1997): 28.

⁷⁴ Jim Cooper, “Music Isn’t Everything,” *Mediaweek* 8, no. 46 (1998): 9.

stars, or pop culture,” as cast member David Wain claimed in a commentary track for *The State* box set.⁷⁵ They were also directed at *Beavis and Butthead*, Mike Judge’s crudely drawn and voiced observational sitcom about a pair of juvenile delinquents and hobbyist rock critics who often cut class to watch music videos at home. This served as a way for MTV to replay clips by mainstays like Pearl Jam and Metallica to allow the program to supposedly reflect the tastes of its young, white, male target audience through its titular characters’ enthusiastic and comically derisive assessments of contemporary music videos. Similar synergistic principles were applied to *Beavis* spin-off *Daria* and other animated and live-action fictional programs during the late 90s and early 2000s that drew from contemporary rock, hip-hop, pop, and dance songs of the period to embellish these programs’ depiction of teenage and young adult leisure in ways similar to their broadcast counterparts on FOX, UPN, and the WB.

However, many of the channel’s gestures toward exploiting the recording industry’s synergistic potential during this period were short-sighted and poorly applied. As the channel’s distribution arm, MTV Studios was unwilling to shoulder the licensing costs required for these programs to be released on DVD with the original music cues intact. Such a prohibitively expensive curative endeavor resulted in multi-year delays before these programs were transferred and distributed on DVD. Part of the issue was volume. In its first season, *Daria* averaged ten separate songs per half-hour episode.⁷⁶ Similarly a typical *Beavis and Butthead* episode, which was usually comprised of two stand-alone vignettes connected and interrupted by the titular pair’s armchair criticism, included several different music videos that were sometimes played in their entirety. As a cost-cutting maneuver, these songs were often either replaced with library music and soundalikes or, in *Beavis and Butthead*’s case, excised altogether for DVD

⁷⁵ “Season 1, Episode 2 DVD Commentary,” *The State: The Complete Series* (Hollywood: MTV Networks, 2009).

⁷⁶ “Episode Guide: Song List – Season One,” *Outpost Daria*. http://outpost-daria-reborn.info/song_list_1.html.

repackaging.⁷⁷ In certain instances, the removal of the original cue was particularly noticeable. For example, the “Pants” sketch from *The State*’s first season used the bassline to the Breeders’ 1993 single “Cannonball” to establish the piece’s rhythm in its editing during a sequence where a character tries on slacks at department store BFO, prompting cast member Tom Lennon to instruct the viewers “at home listening to this [DVD commentary track to] put on [the song] and push ‘play’ right when it gets to the montage,” with director Michael Patrick Jann adding “we would sing it, but we would get sued.”⁷⁸ Bosshouse Music composer Stephen Phillips attempted to replicate the original song’s formal elements through a soundalike, but the results do not entirely match up, an issue further exacerbated by the removal of singers Kim and Kelley Deal’s vocal harmonies.⁷⁹ Thus MTV’s mandate to saturate a program’s soundtrack with wall-to-wall music cues went hand in glove with the expectation that individual cues would be altered or removed if they prohibited these properties from reaching the home viewer market. Such decisions also imply how programs can be delegitimated through their use of musical recordings. As Fox Music senior vice president Anton Monsted put it in a supervisors’ roundtable for *Variety*, audiences “absolutely know when something has been applied like wallpaper in a way that’s not thoughtful and not helping the story. And that’s reflected in the inverse when the job’s done skillfully and with feeling.”⁸⁰ MTV programs often applied its needle drops like wallpaper for initial broadcast, only to have to remove or replace music with cheaper cues once they traveled across video and DVD formats. These practices would continue on different platforms in the 2010s as MTV Networks decelerated DVD distribution and entered into a licensing

⁷⁷ David Lambert, “Daria: First Details Emerge About MTV’s ‘Complete Series’ Plans,” *TV Shows on DVD*, November 21, 2009. <http://www.tvshowsondvd.com/news/Daria-DVD-Plans/13010>.

⁷⁸ “Season 1, Episode 4 DVD Commentary,” *The State: The Complete Series* (Hollywood: MTV Networks, 2009).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Steve Chagollan, “Music Supervisors Strike Grace Notes,” *Variety* 325, no. 1 (2014): 111.

agreement with Amazon Prime, which picked up *Awkward* in 2013 after making the first season available through its on-demand service, CreateSpace, which helped preserve most of the cues that were pulled from MTV's Web site for licensing reasons.⁸¹

But *Awkward*'s presence on MTV's schedule was also a response to the channel's perceived need for more scripted content in the late 2000s after a decade-plus focus on reality programming. In a February 2009 cover story for *Broadcasting & Cable*, contributor Alex Weprin breathlessly asked "Can MTV Gets Its Groove Back?" Following a lean year capped by a 21-percent ratings dive and a 23-percent fourth-quarter drop in viewers between the ages of 12 and 34 that greatly concerned Viacom CEO Philippe Dauman, newly minted general manager Stephen Friedman and executive vice president of series development and programming Tony DiSanto implemented a two-part strategy to combat this decline.⁸² They launched 16 new unscripted series and a handful of animated and scripted programs by the end of the year, as well as developed block programming for Sunday nights and weekday afternoons in order to target supposedly underserved audiences.⁸³ Indeed DiSanto, who first cut his teeth as an intern with the channel while attending New York University, made strides with *Made*, *Run's House*, and *The Andy Milonakis Show* while he was senior vice president of production and later associated himself with long-form narrative programming by developing ratings hit *Laguna Beach*.⁸⁴ DiSanto hoped to parlay that success by turning some of MTV's well-received properties into feature-length genre fare, and put horror film adaptations of *Made* and *My Super Sweet Sixteen*

⁸¹ "Amazon and Viacom Announce Multi-Year Video Licensing Agreement; Adds a Selection of TV Shows Available Exclusively on Prime Instant Video," *Business Wire*, June 4, 2013. <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20130604006141/en/Amazon-Viacom-Announce-Multi-Year-Video-Licensing-Agreement>; Mike Hale, "High School, That Hilarious Minefield," *New York Times*, November 6, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/arts/television/awkward-teenage-sitcom-on-mtv.html?_r=0.

⁸² Daniel Frankel, "Television: MTV's Big Reality Check," *Variety* 413, no. 6 (2008): 12-13; Alex Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back," *Broadcasting & Cable* 139, no. 8 (2009): 10-12.

⁸³ Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back."

⁸⁴ Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

into development by the fall of 2009.⁸⁵ Yet under Graden's leadership Friedman and DiSanto developed reality properties. These programs placed particular emphasis on celebrity, following the success of *Laguna Beach* spin-off *The Hills* and its depiction of young women working in fashion and media in order to represent, as Graden told Daniel Frankel, "accomplishment. Our shows are going to focus less on loud and silly hooks and more on young people proving themselves. These are the themes that are consistent with the Obama generation."⁸⁶

However, MTV's sponsors were particularly concerned with the rise in female viewers during the previous year. In 2008, 48% percent of the channel's audience was comprised of women and girls between the ages of 12 to 34; conversely, their male counterparts only accounting for 22% of MTV's total viewership.⁸⁷ Friedman and DiSanto viewed this concentration of female viewers not as an opportunity, but as a liability.⁸⁸ Such thinking aligned with Brian Graden's long-standing insistence that MTV's channel brand had to be broad enough to encompass male and female viewers and thus needed to appeal to young men in order to mind the gap. As Graden told *TelevisionWeek*'s Paula Bernstein, "We want women to watch MTV ... but the brands shouldn't be identified by gender. There's a real blurring of the gender lines with this generation, so it's less and less clear that a particular show is geared to a particular gender," a perception he was tested on when MTV reoriented its programming toward hip-hop and rock acts following teen-pop's turn-of-the-millennium heyday and managed to be the highest-ranking cable channel in primetime among female viewers between the ages of 18 and 34.⁸⁹ Thus Friedman and DiSanto stuffed their "See You Sunday" primetime block with reality shows *Rob*

⁸⁵ "MTV Continues to Expand Programming With Roster of New Original Movies," *PR Newswire*, August 26, 2009. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mtv-continues-to-expand-programming-with-roster-of-new-original-movies-62070957.html>.

⁸⁶ Frankel, "MTV's Big Reality Check," 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back."

⁸⁹ Paula Bernstein, "Women Want Their MTV Too," *TelevisionWeek* 22, no. 45 (2003): 26.

Dyrdek's Fantasy Factory and *Nitro Circus*, which documented the professional and personal lives of extreme sports figures Dyrdek and Travis Pastrana and were produced by *Jackass* star Johnny Knoxville's Dickhouse Productions. They also programmed *How's Your News*, which was produced by *South Park*'s Matt Stone and Trey Parker, and *The CollegeHumor Show*, two "fake news" programs in the vein of *The Daily Show*. Despite their efforts to "get a much higher density of young guys," in Friedman's words, by the end of the year only Dyrdek's show would remain on the schedule while the others were programming casualties due to low ratings.⁹⁰ But during 2008's fourth quarter, female viewership between 12 and 24 had dropped 33% and top-rated shows like *The Hills* weathered a reported 26% loss in male and female 12-34 viewers.⁹¹

Such poor ratings eventually took their toll on key members of MTV's executive team. By the end of 2009, DiSanto began organizing his exit strategy, as reported in a *Wall Street Journal* item announcing his departure from MTV in October 2010 with senior programming executive Liz Gately for Electus, a production company created by former NBC Entertainment co-chair Ben Silverman.⁹² DiSanto was allowed to produce new programming for MTV. However he was effectively replaced by David Janollari, DiSanto's deputy in scripted programming and the WB's former entertainment president, whose first move was to adapt the 1985 high school fantasy comedy *Teen Wolf* for MTV.⁹³ As programming chief, Janollari followed his predecessor and prioritized scripted content in order to compete with broadcast networks' and cable channels' efforts to court young viewers, despite failing to generate returns that could match, much less eclipse, the estimated nine million viewers who tuned in for reality

⁹⁰ Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back."

⁹¹ Frankel, "MTV's Big Reality Check," 13.

⁹² Sam Schechner, "Program Chief at MTV is Leaving," *Wall Street Journal*, October 2, 2010. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704483004575524893122600432>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

programs like ratings juggernaut *Jersey Shore*.⁹⁴ During MTV's annual programming presentation for advertisers in February 2011, Janollari justified his strategy by saying "our audience doesn't know we're in this game yet. They don't turn to us as a destination for scripted programming. We have to be in this for the long haul. We're at our best when our slate is diverse."⁹⁵ Under Janollari's watch, MTV greenlit *I Just Want My Pants Back*, animated series *Good Vibes*, zombie sitcom *Death Valley*, and a teen dramedy entitled *This Is Awkward*, which would eventually be shortened to *Awkward*, whose premise *USA Today*'s Gary Levin summarized as being about "a 15-year-old who everyone mistakenly believes attempted suicide" while weathering an accident while at summer camp after losing her virginity to the most popular boy at her high school.⁹⁶ Creator Lauren Iungerich, a screenwriter who sold the show to MTV before *Hard Times* aired, had some success as a staffer on ABC Family's remake of *10 Things I Hate About You* and as the creator of Web series *My Two Fans*, which gave her experience with writing, directing, producing, and editing a television program on a budget of \$35,000—compared to MTV's seasonal budget of \$10 million.⁹⁷ While working on *10 Things*, Iungerich developed the idea for *Awkward* based on her own experiences with and her love of John Hughes' run of Brat Pack films, which pursued young people's navigation of identity, conformity, and transformation to articulate a sense of self.⁹⁸ However, Iungerich could not pitch while under contract with ABC Family. Iungerich quit *10 Things* after its first season and signed a blind deal with CBS Productions before accepting MTV's offer and hiring on fellow *10 Things*

⁹⁴ Gary Levin, "MTV Down, But Not Done, With Scripted Series," *USA Today*, February 3, 2011. http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2011-02-03-mtv03_ST_N.htm.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Lisa Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of," *Written By 17*, no. 3 (2013): 42-47.

⁹⁸ Christina Radish, "Creator Lauren Iungerich Exclusive Interview AWKWARD," *Collider*, August 23, 2011. <http://collider.com/lauren-iungerich-awkward-interview/>; Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of."

staff writer Erin Ehrlich to share co-runner responsibilities during *Awkward*'s first season.⁹⁹ For Iungerich, this mirrored the ascent of television producers Ryan Murphy and Kevin Williamson, who got started at the WB and worked for cheap in order to create the network's brand, even if the accepted perception that MTV was "new" to scripted programming was heavily constructed to appeal to legitimating discourses around quality television and anti-heroism.¹⁰⁰

Awkward premiered later that year on Tuesday July 11, with *Jersey Shore* as its lead-in, and was picked up for a second season a month later.¹⁰¹ An estimated 1.7 million viewers tuned in for the pilot, and the show was warmly received by a handful of critics who favorably compared it to scripted programs like *Daria* and *My So-Called Life*, whose sardonic perspective resulted from the cerebral, weary, and literary young women at their center.¹⁰² After its first season, *Awkward* generated more critical good will for its nuanced depictions of young women's complicated social bonds, conflicted body image, sexual autonomy, and complex interior lives within the half-hour sitcom's presumably narrow confines.¹⁰³ These insights resulted in part from Iungerich conducting focus groups comprised of current students from the high school she attended in Palos Verdes during development on the first season with her writing staff. During

⁹⁹ Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of."

¹⁰⁰ Myles McNutt, "Cultural Interview: Awkward. Creator/Showrunner Lauren Iungerich, Part 1," *Cultural Learnings*, June 26, 2012. <http://cultural-learnings.com/2012/06/26/cultural-interview-awkward-creatorshowrunner-lauren-iungerich-part-one/>.

¹⁰¹ Natalie Abrams, "MTV Renews Freshman Comedy *Awkward* for Season 2," *TV Guide*, August 15, 2011. <http://www.tvguide.com/news/mtv-renews-awkward-1036407/>.

¹⁰² Joanne Ostrow, "MTV's 'Awkward' is Scripted Bliss," *Denver Post*, July 15, 2011. http://www.denverpost.com/ci_18471976; Adam W. Kepler, "Teenagers Rule," *New York Times*, July 22, 2011. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9506E3D91E3CF931A15754C0A9679D8B63>; Mike Hale, "High School, That Hilarious Minefield," *New York Times*, November 6, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/arts/television/awkward-teenage-sitcom-on-mtv.html?_r=0.

¹⁰³ Rob Nelson, "Iungerich: Teen Travails Anything But 'Awkward,'" *Variety*, June 7, 2012. <http://variety.com/2012/scene/news/iungerich-teen-travails-anything-but-awkward-1118054791/>; Adam Rathe, "On the Cringe," *Out* 20, no. 10 (2012): 34; Emma Rosenblum, "Rock On, Awkward Girls," *Glamour* 110, no. 8 (2012): 118; Brad Newsome, "Highlight Awkward MTV, Wednesday, 8:30 p.m.," *The Age*, September 13, 2012. <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/wednesday-sept-19-20120912-25r50.html>; Amy Zimmerman, "In Praise of 'Awkward': OMFG MTV, Like, Really Gets High School," *The Daily Beast*, June 20, 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/20/in-praise-of-awkward-omfg-mtv-like-really-gets-high-school.html>.

that time, “we asked them about everything—sex, drugs, everything, and took copious notes. Through it, we came up with a lot of language, and we created a lot of language. We tried to be truly authentic to how kids speak.”¹⁰⁴ In subsequent seasons, Iungerich talked to high schoolers to refine her show’s depiction of this particular milieu.¹⁰⁵ Such recognition was vital to *Awkward*’s livelihood, as MTV’s ratings continued to decline significantly between its first two seasons due to cooled interest in programs like *Jersey Shore*, competition from other channels and streaming services, as well as lessened consumer interest in MTV’s brand.¹⁰⁶ And despite executives’ previous attempts to court young male viewers through hegemonic appeals to extreme athletes, fraternization, and regressive humor, what solidified *Awkward*’s value for MTV was its foregrounding of an explicitly feminine subjectivity that was the product of the interaction between female characters and the protagonist’s ambivalent narration. While Iungerich was reluctant to identify gender’s influence in the writer’s room and claimed to “hire the best writer that I feel is right for the show. I am blind to who they are,” the show’s predominantly female writing staff certainly drew upon their own experiences when shaping characters and breaking stories.¹⁰⁷ The soundtrack, which was comprised primarily of female singer-songwriters, contributed to the program’s sensibility and its commercial appeal. As supervisor Ben Hochstein explained, “*Awkward* goes for the indie/electronic/singer-songwriter vibe ... We try to find songs that will appeal to a wide audience, but something a little different and unique, a little edge. Hopefully we are introducing artists they aren’t familiar with, but will

¹⁰⁴ Radish, “Creator Lauren Iungerich Exclusive Interview AWKWARD.”

¹⁰⁵ Lesley Goldberg, “‘Awkward’ Showrunner on Love Triangles and Lessons From ‘Friday Night Lights,’” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 28, 2012. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/awkward-season-2-lauren-iungerich-341864>.

¹⁰⁶ Jeanine Poggi, “Why Cable Has Become More Like Broadcast TV,” *Advertising Age* 83, no. 20 (2012): 16.

¹⁰⁷ Rosen, “Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of.”

grow to love.”¹⁰⁸ Two artists—Best Coast and Tegan and Sara—were integral to the show’s attempts at commercial and critical relevance for MTV and within the television industry.

I Listen to Your Voice

A day after its early September air date, *Teen Vogue* posted a short interview with Best Coast front woman Bethany Cosentino about her work as the guest music supervisor for the penultimate episode to *Awkward*’s second season.¹⁰⁹ Cosentino’s willingness to reach for the corporate brass ring also coincided with her thematic preoccupation with young women’s romantic angst and desire to grow up. This combination made her a viable collaborator with MTV. Though her band had already received coverage and placement on the cable network and its sister site, MTV2, her creative evolution and the audience she amassed from her musical and other entrepreneurial efforts reflected the narrative progression between *Awkward*’s first and second seasons. Earlier that year, Cosentino’s band released their sophomore album, *The Only Place*. The record was perceived as a step forward for the group, who previously released three EPs and one album, *Crazy for You*, on Brooklyn-based independent label Mexican Summer. These titles received attention from the music press, particularly for their lo-fi allusions to surf guitar and girl-group vocal harmonies, along with Cosentino’s numerous references to youthful preoccupations with indeterminate liaisons and recreational drug use.¹¹⁰ These elements were perceived as hallmarks of chillwave, a subgenre characterized by independent musicians’ promotional use of microsites like Tumblr and Bandcamp. *New York Times* critic Jon Pareles identified it as “solo acts or minimal bands, often with a laptop at their core, [that] trade on

¹⁰⁸ “Interview: Awkward Music Supervisor,” *MTV*, September 17, 2011. <http://soundtrack.mtv.com/post/interview-awkward-music-supervisor/>.

¹⁰⁹ Sierra Tishgart, “Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast on her Guest Stint as *Awkward*’s Music Supervisor,” *Teen Vogue*, September 14, 2012. <http://www.teenvogue.com/entertainment/music/2012-09/bethany-cosentino-best-coast-mtv-awkward/?slide=1>.

¹¹⁰ Nitsuh Abebe, “Come Up to the Front of the Class,” *Pitchfork*, July 30, 2010. <http://pitchfork.com/features/why-we-fight/7838-why-we-fight-6/>.

memories of electropop from the 1980s, with bouncing, blipping dance music hooks (and often weaker lead voices). It's recession-era music: low-budget and danceable."¹¹¹

However, Cosentino's conversational phrasing and plaintive expressions of romantic angst made Best Coast's music amenable to corporate branding, which the group capitalized upon by offering retailer Urban Outfitters exclusive streaming rights for their full-length debut on their Web site a week before its commercial release.¹¹² Building on that industrial momentum, the group recorded *The Only Place* with veteran producer Jon Brion. In an effort to extend *The Only Place*'s commercial life, Cosentino also partnered with Urban Outfitters on a summer capsule collection, which was bookended by the release of the album and the *Awkward* episode, which the retailer sold out of by the end of the year.¹¹³ Cosentino also found meaningful commercial traction for her work through licensing. Best Coast and Mexican Summer were vigilant in placing selections from the band's full-length debut, *Crazy for You*, in multiple television programs and advertisements as a way to capitalize upon their favorable music press coverage and market themselves to young female viewers. Many of the album's singles, deep cuts, and deleted material appeared on programs like *90210*, *Girls*, and the British teen melodrama *Skins*. In addition, "Far Away"—which was cut from *Crazy For You*—was also pressed as a limited edition seven-inch that was available to buy at the band's merchandise booths during their 2010 tour; selected retailers; and as part of a package deal with Los Angeles-

¹¹¹ Jon Pareles, "Spilling Beyond a Festival's Main Courses." *The New York Times*, March 21, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/22/arts/music/22sxsw2.html?_r=0.

¹¹² Ryan Dombal, "Hear Best Coast's Album in Full," *Pitchfork*, July 12, 2010. <http://pitchfork.com/news/39425-hear-best-coasts-album-in-full/>.

¹¹³ Craig Mathieson, "Surf Pop's New Wave," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 14, 2012. <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/surf-pops-new-wave-20121213-2baqg.html>; Phoebe Reilly, "Feel Good, Inc.," *Spin* 28, no. 4 (2012): 46-51.

based company Eskuché Headphones, who frequently curate small-batch compilations with emergent and lesser-known musical acts for promotional purposes.¹¹⁴

Crazy For You's commercial life was also extended through other placement decisions. This helped expand the narrow promotional windows for recording artists through radio's and music video's rotation practices. Such traditional distribution models relied upon truncated time frames and market saturation, which risked overexposing artists and rigidly demarcated one musician's release from another and often resulted in "the sophomore jinx," or declining sales for a recording act's second effort relative to their much-hyped debut. Integrating Best Coast's music into the storyworld of other television programs allowed various entries in Cosentino's discography to co-exist commercially and potentially find new audiences across a range of media texts over a longer period of time than radio stations' and music video channels' rotation periods, which tend to cycle out singles after a few months. In addition, a portion of *The Only Place*'s penultimate track, "Let's Go Home," appeared in Young and Rubicam's advertisement for JCPenney's home décor collection as a result of Mexican Summer's licensing arrangement with Brooklyn-based promotions firm Terrorbird Media.¹¹⁵

However, Best Coast's presence on *Girls*, *Skins*, and *Parenthood* was usually credited to those productions' music supervisors in the trade press. This was due in part to cultural perceptions about *Girls*' and *Skins*' edgy depictions of sexuality and *Parenthood*'s tendency to improvise camera blocking and work with natural light during the filming of individual scenes, a hallmark of creator Jason Katims' previous series *Friday Night Lights* that often provided a

¹¹⁴ Jason Lipshutz, "Riding a Wave of Buzz: Best Coast Taps Producer Jon Brion and Partners with Urban for Sophomore Release," *Billboard* 124, no. 16 (2012): 27.

¹¹⁵ Andrew McMains, "JCPenney Returns to Lead Agency Model," *Adweek*, April 24, 2013. <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/jcpenney-returns-lead-agency-model-148872>; "Recent Placements," *Terrorbird Media*. <https://terrorbird.com/licensing>.

visual counterpoint to indie rock's highly constructed sense of musical authenticity. Yet *Girls'* attempts to balance indie rock selections with more popular fare, along with the decision to curate songs from mixtapes, were attributed to supervisors Manish Raval and Tom Wolfe and their collaborations with Lena Dunham, executive producers Judd Apatow and Jenni Konner, and Aperture's music library chief Jonathan Leahy.¹¹⁶ *Guardian* contributor Johnny Davis assigned *Skins'* musical point of view to "gatekeeper" Alex Hancock, who oversaw the first season while finishing his studies at King's College and prioritized unsigned acts as a reflection of program's less-than-glamorous Bristol locale in opposition to London's cosmopolitanism.¹¹⁷ Finally, Liza Richardson justified *Parenthood'* low ratings by comparing the program to "quality" cable dramas and aligning the demographic for the NBC show to KCRW's listenership—in other words, upper-middle-class adults with a taste for gentle indie folk acts—which allowed her to reassert her centrality in cultivating the program's sonic aesthetic.¹¹⁸

While these professionals are certainly responsible for the sound of these programs, it overlooks their interactions with recording artists. Hancock's intimation of harpist Joanna Newsom's refusal to license "Emily" to *Skins* gives indication that musicians' relationships with supervisors—and narrative television more broadly—is open to investigation. *Awkward* provides such a window on Cosentino, whose first two albums allowed her to develop an affective bond with young female listeners who identified with the singer's girly brand of lopsided romanticism. As Cosentino told Craig Mathieson of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "[t]o have teenage girls look up to me" for her confessional songwriting about romantic and interpersonal crises as a young

¹¹⁶ Phil Gallo, "'Girls' Music Supervisor Manish Raval Talks About Finding 'Cool Music,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 14, 2013. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/girls-music-supervisor-manish-raval-412258>.

¹¹⁷ Johnny Davis, "Get With the Programme," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/feb/15/television-music-skins>.

¹¹⁸ "Liza Richardson, Music Supervisor, *Parenthood*: 1-on-1 from the Billboard Film/TV Conference," *Billboard*, November 8, 2012. <http://www.billboard.com/video/liza-richardson-music-supervisor-parenthood-1-on-1-from-the-billboard-filmtv-conference-428904>.

woman “is really special for me. That’s the best part of this job.”¹¹⁹ She often positioned such girl fan practices with her own. In the mid-90s when Cosentino came of age, the path to finding such a consumer base would have been paved in MTV Buzz Bin clips, heavy rotation on video programs like *120 Minutes* and *Alternative Nation*, and placement on the network’s various compilation albums and promotional spots. Much of Cosentino’s cultural frame of reference as a musician also grew out of her avid consumption of film soundtracks from this period, which MTV would often publicize, as she explained to Richard K. Shirway in a 2015 installment of the podcast *Song Exploder* when discussing the inspiration from her song “Feeling Ok” in relation to other selections from her oeuvre. In particular, she isolated one compositional element as being key to her process as a songwriter in relation to its convergent potential. Many of Cosentino’s songs “[have] a very evident booming chorus. I wanted everything to sort of have a vibe of sort of 90s movie soundtracks, because when I was growing up all the movies that I loved, like *Clueless* and *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She’s All That*.”¹²⁰

Three things are particularly important about Cosentino’s disclosure about her influences in relation to the context she worked within at the turn of the 2010s and her contributions to *Awkward*. First it is notable that Cosentino came of age during a benchmark era for film soundtracks as expressions of convergence. Studio executives and marketing departments tirelessly developed merchandise and ancillary properties in order to exploit opportunities for synergy, particularly to maximize the profitability of these products in relation to the rest of the chain of production that their corporate parents’ oversaw and ran. For example, two of the soundtracks that Cosentino identifies—*10 Things I Hate About You* and *Clueless*—benefitted

¹¹⁹ Mathieson, “Surf Pop’s New Wave.”

¹²⁰ “Episode 48: Best Coast, ‘Feeling Okay,’” *Song Exploder*, August 27, 2015. <http://songexploder.net/best-coast>.

from vertical integration, as well as demonstrated the inherent messiness of integrating songs as volatile units of intellectual property into commercial works of narrative fiction. *10 Things*’ was a deceptively straightforward example.¹²¹ The film was produced and distributed by Touchstone and Buena Vista Pictures, which were part of Disney’s film division. Similarly, the soundtrack was released on Hollywood Records, a record label owned by the Disney Music Group that former CEO Michael Eisner founded in 1989. However, the compilation soundtrack was primarily comprised of artists who were not on Hollywood. The lone exceptions were Jessica Riddle and Leroy, whose songs “Even Angels Fall” and “New World” were placed on the soundtrack in anticipation of their debut albums’ release dates. Hollywood also featured a handful of songs by of-the-moment alternative rock bands like Semisonic and the Cardigans, whose work was acquired through licensing arrangements with Universal Music Group. But the majority of the album relied upon back catalogue material from older artists like George Clinton, Joan Armatrading, and Madness, as well as cover songs and original works that derived heavily from another artist’s material. Those selections were Letters to Cleo’s versions of Nick Lowe’s “Cruel to Be Kind” and Cheap Trick’s “I Want You to Want Me,” and Save Ferris’ “I Know,” which contained an interpolation of “Shout” by the Isley Brothers. While those respective bands and their source material were also not represented by Disney—Letters to Cleo were on the Warner-owned Giant, Save Ferris signed with Sony subsidiary Epic, Cheap Trick’s single was released on Epic in 1977, Nick Lowe was signed to British indie Radar Records with a distribution deal through Warner Music Group, and “Shout” was recorded in 1959 when the Isley Brothers were on RCA Records a few decades before Sony’s acquisition of the label—both bands’ willingness to record cover songs for the soundtrack allowed Hollywood to circumvent

¹²¹ *10 Things I Hate About You: Music From the Original Motion Picture* (Los Angeles: Hollywood Records, 1999).

the regulations of sync licensing by paying for the publishing rights in an exchange for producing new works that Disney could own and that the bands could not re-release for themselves. *Clueless*'s soundtrack seemed disconnected from the film's studio.¹²² It was released on Capitol, then owned by British music and electronics corporation EMI, while the film was distributed by Paramount Pictures, which had been newly acquired by Viacom. However, it drew extensively from Capitol's current roster, particularly Radiohead as well as Luscious Jackson and the Beastie Boys through their label Grand Royal, a joint venture between Capitol and Def Jam. The studio also marketed the film extensively and used Viacom's ownership of youth-oriented cable channels like MTV to court its intended adolescent audience, including Cosentino.

Of course, representing the *Clueless* and *10 Things* soundtracks purely as cynical products of media conglomeration would be reductive and fail to capture the impact of their resonance with young female audiences hungry for their identities and concerns to be reflected in their media consumption. It also would not address the implications of those influences later being used as blueprints for female musicians' original creative work as adults. Thus it is also worth mentioning that both soundtracks accompanied films that were adaptations of literary and theatrical works, respectively Jane Austen's *Emma* and William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, that used their source material to represent young white women's coming of age within the historical context of third-wave feminism and the riot grrrl movement. Both *Clueless* and *10 Things* feature bright, autonomous teenage girls navigating the various social mores and rites of passage that surround self-fashioning, courtship, popularity, and education as it is felt within the confines of high school. These soundtracks advantageously drew upon the productive frisson between guitar-driven rock music and young female protagonists' vivid voiceover narration. The

¹²² *Clueless: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1995).

films relied upon particular aspects of screenwriting like voiceover and stylized dialogue to demonstrate Cher Horowitz's and Kat Stratford's wit and intelligence. In turn, the soundtracks featured singer-songwriters like Jill Sobule and female-fronted rock bands like Letters to Cleo, who became an influence on Cosentino as a guitarist and singer-songwriter.

Finally, Cosentino identified these songs' compositional emphasis on large, vocal-driven choruses with heavily treated or processed vocals so that it would be prominently foregrounded in the mix as an influence on her own songwriting. In this regard, choruses serve two related functions. They are often the distillation of a song's central idea or argument. As a result they are also meant to be catchy and instantly memorable to a wide audience who is encouraged to sing along, either as part of a sweaty throng longing for cathartic release at a concert or in private moments of their daily lives. This is not an insignificant compositional unit for female artists who are trying to express their own ambivalence about their lives, relationships, and desires. It is also an incredibly meaningful aspect of songwriting for supervisors, who will often seize upon the affective dimensions and intent of a song's chorus, verse, or other discrete recording segment in order to reinforce the information offered from dialogue and actors' non-verbal communication choices as a way to visualize their characters' frames of mind. On *Awkward* in particular, the uses of anthemic choruses sung by booming female voices like Cosentino's serves to reinforce the centrality of Jenna's voice on the show as an important thematic element in telling a coming-of-age narrative from a distinctly female point of view. Yet isolating marketable fragments of a song for the purposes of economical storytelling is not without its problems. Indeed, many critics perceive this as a way to obliterate any potential complexity to a song by prioritizing and isolating its most commercially palatable passage at the expense of the larger work's potential nuance or ambiguity. This tension between a song passage's capacities for

artistic self-expression and commercial exploitation are relevant to Best Coast's participation on *Awkward* as both a recording artist and a guest music supervisor.

MTV hoped to profit from some of Cosentino's inspiration for *Awkward* by showcasing her music. In addition to all of its other placements, the title track from Best Coast's *Crazy For You* was the first cue in *Awkward*'s third episode, "The Way We Weren't," which fleshed out the uncertain future of Jenna's tentative relationship with Matty McKibben (Beau Mirchoff), a popular athlete at her high school who is initially reticent to ingratiate her into his robust social life at Palos Hill High School. Cosentino may have also had some sentimental attachment to the series, as she explained in an interview that "[t]he first time I ever heard a Best Coast song in a show was actually on *Awkward*."¹²³ Such affinities may also reflect MTV's efforts to align themselves with the singer's music, as well as her sentimental attachments with MTV during her own adolescence as a young woman and music fan. *Awkward*'s music supervisor Ben Hochstein built upon the music department and MTV's relationship with Best Coast for the program's second season, which included three selections from *The Only Place*—closer "Up All Night," "No One Like You," and "My Life"—for its fourth, sixth, and penultimate episodes, the latter which Bethany Cosentino supervised, as a way to roll out her new album.

For the second season's penultimate episode, *Awkward* crafted a series of "what if?" scenarios for its protagonist. In an effort to figure her way out of her romantic conflict between Matty and Jake, as well as fantasize about the thrills and hazards of popularity from an outsider's perspective, Jenna uses her blog to pursue a series of alternative realities. This episode thus serves two functions. First, Iungerich and her writing staff used Jenna's interactions with her readership in the comments section as a proxy for the audiences' vocal (and engineered)

¹²³ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

investment in the central love triangle and as a way to toy with their expectations. Second, it allowed the show's music department and MTV to capitalize upon its associations with Best Coast. This stint was largely for promotional purposes, as MTV was ginning up interest in the program's season finale and Cosentino was plugging an album that was released four months before the episode's September 13 air date. The episode's soundtrack was also product of careful coordination between a set of record labels and licensing firms and not simply the expression of one musician applying her taste and artistic vision to narrative television. Nonetheless Cosentino's discursive performance of inspiration and musical knowledge is significant, particularly in terms of how she aligns herself affectively with specific selections from peer recording artists in relation to her abilities to empathize with the gendered aspects of the protagonist's central conflict and her coping mechanisms. "Once" opens with Jenna typing furiously. Her thought process is expressed in voiceover:

I used to think being in love with two people at once only happened on reality shows, where finding a soul mate was nudged along by a dozen roses, a cheesetastic host, and a camera crew up your ass. I never bought that bogus B.S.—until it happened to me. I didn't have to choose between Matty or Jake, but I wanted to. When it came to life-altering decisions, I resorted to my go-to method of problem-solving—blogging it out. Turns out my readers were as confused as I was. It was impossible to think with the peanut gallery chiming in. How could I possibly blog my way to an answer if I couldn't blog my truth, unless I tried my hand at fiction?¹²⁴

Accompanying the inner monologue that Jenna dictates into her word processor is "Into Black," a minor-key, reverb-laden track by the rock band Blouse that is anchored by heavy drums,

¹²⁴ "Once Upon a Blog," *Awkward*, Season 2, Episode 11, September 13, 2012.

processed guitars, and lead singer Charlie Hilton's romantic vocals.¹²⁵ In the context of the episode's cold open, the cue is meant to evoke a slightly gloomy atmosphere that reflects Jenna's introspection. However, the inclusion of Blouse's lead single to their self-titled 2011 debut album was also indicative of MTV's ongoing relationship with labels and promotions firms. The Portland-based trio signed with Captured Tracks in 2010, a Brooklyn-based label. For their sophomore effort *Imperium*, which Captured Tracks co-released with Sub Pop in 2013, the group signed publicity and sync licensing agreements with Omnian Music Group, an in-house venture Captured Tracks' founder Mike Sniper launched in 2014 in order to develop smaller imprints for experimental musicians and to cater to the reissues market; strengthen its partnerships with labels like Flying Nun, Coupe Skate, and Squirrel Thing; and start Sinderlyn, a new label specializing in the release of EPs and singles from emerging artists associated with a range of generic styles.¹²⁶ Sniper patterned Omnian after Beggars Group, a London-based independent conglomerate that owns British and American labels 4AD, Rough Trade, XL Recordings, Young Turks, and Matador, as "a way [for me] to work with more artists, do more things, hire more staff—not burden [Captured Tracks] by tying 25 more artists to it, doing 50 million projects with it. I'm interested in having more companies to oversee."¹²⁷ However, evidence of Sniper's entrepreneurial zeal was evident in the placement and licensing decisions for Blouse's first record. Despite Cosentino's discursive performance as a guest supervisor for *Awkward*, the placement of Blouse's "Into Black" was overseen by Terrorbird Media's licensing division,

¹²⁵ Blouse, "Into Black," *Blouse* (New York: Captured Tracks, 2011).

¹²⁶ Brownie Marie, "Brooklyn Indie Label Omnian Music Group Signs Distribution Deal With the Orchard," *AXS*, September 21, 2014. <http://www.axs.com/brooklyn-indie-label-omnian-music-group-signs-distribution-deal-with-t-20609>.

¹²⁷ Harley Brown, "Captured Tracks Head Mike Sniper to Launch Omnian Music Group, Inspired By Beggars Group," *Billboard*, June 30, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/record-labels/6141099/captured-tracks-head-mike-sniper-to-launch-omnian-music>.

which also represented other Captured Tracks artists.¹²⁸ Yet Cosentino claimed to have chosen the track because of its romantic formal properties, which she felt would complement the protagonist's feminine subjectivity, stating that "I really love the intro to this song—it's kind of pensive and dark, but really dreamy. Jenna is in her bed blogging, and I felt like the mood of this song really captured the mood of being in bed writing in your diary about a boy."¹²⁹ Cosentino took her cues from actress Ashley Rickards' performance, surmising from her voiceover, irritated grimaces, and percussive typing that "[y]ou can tell that she's feeling a little angsty. This song definitely has of a darker, like angstier feel to it, so I thought that the two would work really well together."¹³⁰ Blouse's cavernous song also provides a transition into the episode's first fantasy sequence, a *Twilight*-esque interlude in the high school gymnasium where Jenna humorously imagines herself as Bella, the everygirl protagonist caught in a love triangle between Matty's brooding vampire Edward Cullen and Jake's sensitive werewolf Jacob Black.

After the show's title card, Best Coast's "My Life," an album cut from *The Only Place* fades in to more explicitly reassert Cosentino's associations with the program, as well as extend the commercial life of the singer's second full-length effort. Unlike the album's title track and its follow-up "Why I Cry," "My Life" was not officially released as a single by the group's label Mexican Summer. However it was able to find placement for the song, not on radio or with a video to hazard putting into rotation or uploading onto YouTube, but through a licensing arrangement between MTV and Terrorbird specifically for *Awkward*.¹³¹ The fast-paced, charging punk ballad features the singer's pleading vocals high in the mix to highlight its opening stanza—"When I go on airplanes, I listen to your voice/And when I go to sleep at night, I'm

¹²⁸ "Recent Placements," *Terrorbird Media*. <https://terrorbird.com/licensing>.

¹²⁹ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ "Recent Placements," *Terrorbird Media*. <https://terrorbird.com/licensing>.

wishing for a choice/To go back in time/Makes what's wrong feel right.”¹³² In this moment, Cosentino's difficulty reconciling romantic love with a recording artist's nomadic life on tour is aligned with Jenna's indecisiveness. In particular, the singer's wish to go back in time to reconcile poor past decisions is echoed by Jenna's internal monologue, which emphasizes the importance of writing in order to imagine her future with both prospects in an effort to resolve her emotional ambivalence. However, Cosentino was quick to point out in an interview with MTV that she had no hand in the selection process. “You will hear one Best Coast track. I didn't pick it though,” Cosentino admitted with slight bemusement, as if to suggest that weaving your song into the fabric of a compilation soundtrack would be distasteful and too boldly self-promotional despite the inherently promotional nature of Cosentino's participation with *Awkward* as well as its music department's client relationship with Terrorbird.¹³³ This admission may also imply the singer's lack of oversight in her own song's placement despite the careful framing of her autonomy and marquee status as the episode's guest supervisor. Perhaps as a result she then reasons that its placement “works really well in this episode because Jenna is trying to figure out if she could go back in time and, like, redo it with both of the guys, like, what would have happened.” Such sentiments were reinforced with footage of Cosentino watching the scene in the editing bay with “My Life” added in. As she exclaims to Iungerich, “It goes so well with it. It makes it so emotional ... I was like, ‘Am I gonna cry to my own song?’”¹³⁴

Later in the episode, Cosentino dropped “Bad Feeling,” a boisterous rock track from Veronica Falls, a British outfit signed to established Washington D.C.-based indie pop label Slumberland. The chiming, dramatic track showcases lead singer Roxanne Clifford's

¹³² Best Coast, “My Life,” *The Only Place* (New York: Mexican Summer, 2012).

¹³³ “Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

conversational alto, whose lyrics highlight the romantic conflict between Jenna and Matty, who has become weary of his girlfriend's entitlement. As they fight over renting a limousine for the upcoming school dance, Clifford sings "Your face in the mirror/Is only getting clearer."¹³⁵ Cosentino observed that "Jenna is being really demanding and acting like a brat. This song has a really girly and rock 'n' roll vibe to it, and I felt like it captured Jenna's mood perfectly ... It had this very like bad-ass, ... tough girl sound to it. And it's a scene where Jenna is giving, like, a lot of attitude and the song had a lot of attitude, so I thought that those two things just went together really well."¹³⁶ After conspiring with Jake, Matty decides to leave Jenna for Ming. From here, Jenna imagines her potential romantic life with Jake. Over Phantogram's "16 Years," which prominently feature Sarah Barthel's wispy vocals over a bed of heavily processed and distorted guitars,¹³⁷ Jenna reflects on the first time she kissed Jake the year before and decided to come clean about her relationship with Matty and rewrites history to give them a fresh start they did not get to have in real life, only to imagine them as sexually incompatible. The next scene is a montage of the pair's sexual escapades, with Jake becoming visibly less comfortable after each encounter despite Jenna's clear fulfillment. For the montage, Cosentino used "Bedroom Eyes" by Dum Dum Girls, a noise pop outfit whose girl-group aesthetic was inspired by punk bands' lo-fi approximation of producer Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, to ironically comment on their conflict. As Cosentino explained to MTV, "There's a sex scene and it's called 'Bedroom Eyes,' so it was kind of like a cute thing to pair those two together."¹³⁸ For Tishgart, she added "Jenna thinks their chemistry is really good, but Jake feels differently. This song is very upbeat and summer-y,

¹³⁵ Veronica Falls, "Bad Feeling," *Veronica Falls* (Oakland, CA: Slumberland/Bella Union, 2011).

¹³⁶ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

¹³⁷ Phantogram, "16 Years," *Nightlife* (Seattle, WA: Barsuk Records, 2011).

¹³⁸ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

and it sounds like the soundtrack to kissing a boy in the backseat of his car in high school,” but its feedback-laden production signifies an irreconcilable tension underneath the surface of romantic infatuation.¹³⁹ In this example, Cosentino internalized the need to negotiate between a song’s tone and verbal message in relation to the visual and language-based information imparted in a scene, a delicate balance often required of supervisors. Hochstein reinforced this expectation by complimenting Cosentino’s selection: “You love when the lyrics sort of relate to the scene, but it doesn’t always happen. Like a lot of times you want sort of the vibe to be right and the lyrics aren’t always the most important thing. But here, everything works.”¹⁴⁰

In the episode’s last act, Cosentino used “Chip a Tooth (Spoil a Smile)” by Louis Jones’ power-pop outfit Spectrals, another act signed to Slumberland, to score a sequence where Jenna imagines a future for herself that is untethered to romantic complications. Cosentino explained that the song had “a super dreamy sound to it, and I was picturing a girl sitting in her bed listening to this song thinking about a boy, and maybe how it wouldn’t work out with him ... and since Jenna is writing a fiction piece, it seemed to work really well with that idea.”¹⁴¹ Frustrated by her inability to find a solution even in her imagination, Jenna reflects on her writing process and presents herself with another possible alternative: “was my gut subconsciously trying to protect me from a miserable future with both guys? Which meant there was a third party in the mix: I could pick Jake, or Matty, or no one.”¹⁴² Jenna then imagines a scene where Jake and Matty bump into her in the hallway, causing her to drop her books, which they help pick up. Jenna muses in voiceover “Without so much as a flirtatious wink from Matty or a coy smile from Jake, the boys walked off with their girls never even bothering to ask Jenna’s name” before

¹³⁹ Sierra Tishgate, “Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast on her Guest Stint as *Awkward*’s Music Supervisor.”

¹⁴⁰ “Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “Once Upon a Blog.”

deleting a block of text and rewriting the scene so that Matty and Jake stroll between classes while holding hands. Jenna ultimately makes peace with her situation and writing's purpose as a resource for developing her skill at creative expression while preserving her autonomy.¹⁴³

Cosentino technically only chose four songs out of the fourteen tracks that comprised the episode's soundtrack, which included a number of songs from unsigned artists with Bandcamp profiles as well as library cues that were assuredly selected for their cost-effectiveness. Such production decisions were then implicitly devalued in MTV's promotional featurette with Cosentino and Hochstein, when Iungerich identified Cosentino's contributions as "special songs." This was practice reinforced by MTV's decision to include a chyron crediting the band and song title along with a link to the network's Web site as part of the episode's broadcast and streaming placement, which it only included for the singer's selections. Iungerich framed Cosentino's participation as being "important to the show, the network" while plugging MTV's Web site as a place "where fans can know where to download that song," as well as find out about the recording artists whose work was licensed for the episode in order to "basically give some love to the artist to say 'not only do we love your song in the placement of our show, but we also want to give you [the recording act] a little shoutout with it.'"¹⁴⁴ Cosentino supported the utility of including screen credits—a practice evocative of MTV's foundational broadcast policy with its music videos—in her remarks detailing her decision to include Blouse's "Into Black" in the episode, stating: "I actually heard Blouse on MTV for the first time. And I was like 'this band is really good, what is this?' and then it came up at the bottom [of the screen] 'Blouse' and then I was like 'Oh!' And then I went straight to the Internet and then looked them up."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "Awkward: Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast Guest Music Supervisor."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Yet Cosentino also wanted to use her platform as a guest supervisor to showcase bands she knew personally. This was the case with the inclusion of British outfit Spectrals, whose “Chip a Tooth (Spoil a Smile)” closes the episode. “Every tour we’ve [Best Coast] even done in England, we’ve taken them,” Cosentino revealed before adding “I really wanted to use bands that are either friends of mine, or friends of a friend, or that I think are just really great and aren’t receiving, like, the kind of recognition I think that they deserve.”¹⁴⁶ Such decisions reveal a few different aspects of musicians’ labor upon which supervision mirrors and exploits. First, it demonstrates the centrality of fandom to a recording artist’s profession. Part of being a musician is keeping up with other bands and enthusiastically promoting them in interviews, through bookings, and other aspects of the job. The same is often the case with supervisors, whose job is often defined discursively through their affective bond with particular pieces of music, voices, recording acts, genres, and scenes. Second, it reveals how recording artists heavily rely on touring as a way to generate income by performing for a variety of audiences to support their music while also creating a network for themselves with other bands who play with them as opening acts at various points in their itinerary. It simultaneously highlights how touring—often a disorienting, expensive, physically taxing, and emotionally draining experience for many musicians—organizes musicians’ work and their access to other bands, as well as implies how other industry professionals like supervisors use concerts as a resource to find talent. Finally it showcases the pride of place given to discovery. Musicians and supervisors are lauded for their abilities to unearth and curate music—particularly from new artists, outfits existing outside the margins of mainstream consciousness or regional scenes, or dusty artifacts from lesser-known musicians whose contributions were lost to time—and present their findings to audiences.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Such activities strongly imply that championing an emerging or obscure musical act allows musicians and supervisors to correct in imbalance for performers who deserve greater recognition from the recording industry, the critical press, and music fans than they have been given. Yet at the same time, such curatorial responsibilities are at once gestures toward a fan's intimate relationship with media texts and their efforts to synthesize these relations into original and deeply personal works and expressions of industrial convergence for distinctly commercial purposes. This reinforces the centrality of music fandom to supervision, and highlights the creative and technical skills involved in constructing a relationship between disparate songs by sequencing them together based on shared sonic elements and thematic properties, creating new and deeply personal works out of affective bonds with certain artists and songs, and distributing them through friend groups and networks. Yet such curatorial work often requires not only an awareness of a song's structure and meaning and an ability to manipulate various technologies in order to put these pieces of music in conversation with one another, but also anticipate which songs will work best within the artistic and economic restraints of television storytelling. Thus, while a musician does not necessarily have to use the translate their fandom into television storytelling's aesthetic grammar, industrial and reception practices, and ideological underpinnings, Cosentino based her decisions on what song would make the strongest pairing with *Awkward* visual imagery. According to Iungerich, "[w]hat's so hard about placing songs sometimes is like you'll have a great idea about a song and you'll be like, 'Oh, I wish I could get this in' and it just doesn't work with picture."¹⁴⁷ Such logic governed Cosentino's emphasis on synchronicity between a song's content and a scene's thematic or expository by focusing on how a piece of music "went with" or "paired well with" the narrative's visual language.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

The featurette also indicates that Cosentino's participation occurred within a compressed time frame during post-production. In her interview, she admits to "experiencing a little bit of the toughness [of music supervision] this past week," revealing that Cosentino was not integrated into the second season's pre-production or production cycles, but brought in after "Once Upon a Blog" was filmed. Though supervisors' integration into the production process varies between projects and often in relation to how closely they collaborate with directors, editors, and showrunners, they are usually installed at the beginning of a project's life cycle and assigned for the duration in order to maintain creative and administrative continuity in compiling the program's soundtrack, as Hochstein did with *Awkward*. In addition, almost all of Cosentino's footage was captured in the editing bay. It is quite common for supervisors to work intimately with editors and showrunners on television, an industrial reality visualized by Hochstein and Iungerich flanking Cosentino on the couch in the editing bay. However, Cosentino was so firmly associated with the editing bay at the expense of being isolated from the rest of the production process. This is evident in her deferential attitude toward Hochstein, to whom she often faces and directs her comments in the group interview. It is also apparent in how Iungerich defined Cosentino's participation. "When we sit down and when we have an opportunity to work with someone like you [to Cosentino] and kind of have your thoughts and add you to the process, it's exciting for us because music has always been, by design, a character in the show."¹⁴⁸ Despite Iungerich's attempts to centralize music's place on the program and integrate professionals like Cosentino into its storytelling, her claim that "music is that final piece of the puzzle that makes the story sing, literally and figuratively" strongly implies that its presence is subordinate to plot, dialogue, characterization, and *Awkward*'s other formal and narrative elements.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

More importantly, limiting Cosentino's participation on season two to the selection of a handful of songs in an episode with a ubiquitous soundtrack of over a dozen cues of ubiquitous music comprising indie tracks and library cues also worked to distance the singer-songwriter from supervision's less savory financial realities while benefiting from them. Iungerich claimed that *Awkward's* seasonal budget was \$10 million.¹⁴⁹ This would place the ceiling of its music budget at around \$1 million if the standard ten percent rule¹⁵⁰ was applied to *Awkward's* production and stretched a twelve-episode season with 154 different music cues.¹⁵¹ Though MTV has not publicly disclosed how much the channel paid Cosentino for her supervision work, she most likely received some additional compensation for promotional purposes and also licensed multiple songs for the season that were also available on MTV's Web site for streaming. Thus Cosentino's bemusement over the placement of "My Life" for the episode seems largely disingenuous. In a supervision economy that relies on the undervaluing of musicians' labor with placements for the promise of exposure, Cosentino's promotional function as a guest supervisor only works to reinforce the ideological underpinnings of a practice that finally benefit her. The implications of such placement practices would also come to bear on Tegan and Sara's involvement with the program's third season, who attempted to use the for-hire position as an opportunity to provide exposure to unsigned bands that lacked the duo's major label resources.

A Love Like Ours Is Never Fixed

For *Awkward's* third season, MTV ordered 20 episodes and split the run into two parts. This nearly doubled the length of each of the show's first two seasons, due to its ability to hold down 1.8 million viewers each week and on the basis of its six-percent spike in ratings between

¹⁴⁹ Lisa Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of," *Written By* 17, no. 3 (2013): 42-47.

¹⁵⁰ Jonny Coleman, "Does Hollywood Understand Why Music Supervision Is?," *L.A. Weekly*, September 18, 2015. <http://www.laweekly.com/music/does-hollywood-understand-what-music-supervision-is-6046842>.

¹⁵¹ Tunefind, *Awkward*. <http://www.tunefind.com/show/awkward>.

seasons.¹⁵² This decision followed HBO's directive to break up the final seasons of *Sex and the City* and *The Sopranos* in the mid-2000s, a move that AMC would later replicate to wring out the last drops of *Breaking Bad's* and *Mad Men's* advertising revenue while developing a new series that could equally capture the zeitgeist of its signature programs and stand with its only other ratings giant, *The Walking Dead*.¹⁵³ MTV's decision also mirrored FOX's strategy with its jukebox teen melodrama *Glee*, whose first few seasons were divided in order to generate viewer interest by evoking the temporal demarcation of adolescence into semesters, extended winter and summer vacations, and seasonal rites of passage.¹⁵⁴ For Iungerich, the season's theme was also different. To her mind while season two followed the question "who do I want to be with," the third season was concerned with "who do I want to be" by having Jenna and her friends make surprising decisions and raise challenging questions about their own identities.¹⁵⁵

Sister act Tegan and Sara played a key role in promoting the first installment of *Awkward's* third season, as well as reinforcing Iungerich's and the production's depiction of identity as a transformative and unfixed process. Yet, by the time the duo had made their debut as music supervisors, they had been working steadily for nearly twenty years in the recording industry and gradually moved from a rough, do-it-yourself aesthetic heavily influenced by punk and folk rock to a glossier, more anthemic and commercial-friendly sound. After putting out their debut, *Under Feet Like Ours*, on the Plunk imprint in 1999 Tegan and Sara signed to musician

¹⁵² Stuart Levine, "MTV Renewal is 'Awkward,'" *Variety* 316, no. 18 (2012): 8.

¹⁵³ Aisha Harris, "The Upside of Splitting TV Seasons," *Slate*, September 26, 2013. http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/09/26/mad_men_season_7_split_hints_at_evolution_of_tv_season.html.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Schneider, "'Glee' Co-Creator Gets Big Fox Deal," *Variety*, December 1, 2009. <http://variety.com/2009/scene/markets-festivals/glee-co-creator-gets-big-fox-deal-1118012049/>; Emily Rome, "'Glee': Eight Spoilers to Look Out for in Seasons 2 and 3," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 17, 2011. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/glee-eight-spoilers-look-seasons-168919>.

¹⁵⁵ Lesley Goldberg, "'Awkward' Showrunner on Love Triangles and Lessons From 'Friday Night Lights,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 28, 2012. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/awkward-season-2-lauren-iungerich-341864>.

Neil Young's record label Vapor later that year. While under contract, they released their next two records, *The Business of Art* and *If It Was You*, exclusively with the label. Their fourth record, 2004's *So Jealous*, was jointly released by Vapor and Sanctuary, a UK-based label and subsidiary of BMG, in an effort to capitalize upon their widening international audience. Their next two albums, *The Con* and *Sainthood*, were jointly released on Sire Records, which is owned by Warner Music Group and has a distribution deal with Warner Bros. Records. However, Tegan and Sara were often subject to ridicule and dismissal because they were queer women and an "all-female" rock act that could potentially alienate portions of potentially lucrative audiences for being too niche-oriented. The pair was frustrated by the reductive fixation on their lesbianism, which they believed was meaningful to their identity as women but not necessarily as a foundational musical influence or the central focus of their songwriting and thus threatened to limit their commercial impact within the recording industry. As Tegan Quin put it in a *San Francisco Weekly* feature, "we started playing acoustic guitars not because we wanted to be like [folk-associated singer-songwriters] Ani DiFranco or Jewel, but because we loved the Violent Femmes and the Pixies, and they play acoustic instruments . . . Do people think that because we're female and we have harmonies and we're lesbians?"¹⁵⁶

Yet Tegan and Sara always nurtured and capitalized on their industry connections even as they were getting started, a trait that is evident in an early band profile in *Rockrgirl* that details their experiences opening for arena-rock balladeer Bryan Adams and negotiating the terms of a video's rotation on MTV.¹⁵⁷ They also used their initial lack of commercial and critical success to their advantage to the best of their abilities. While Tegan Quin told T. Cole Rachel in an

¹⁵⁶ Michele Laudig, "Twin Lesbian Duo From Canada!!!! Tegan and Sara's Delectable Pop Makes Lazy Headline Writers Look Stupid," *San Francisco Weekly*, April 13, 2005. <http://www.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/twin-lesbian-duo-from-canada/Content?oid=2155592>.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Haley, "Twin Tones: Checking in with Tegan & Sara," *Rockrgirl* 49 (2003): 32-33.

Advocate profile that “I could go on and on about being young and being women and being twins and being gay, but those were also the things that people often used to discredit our abilities and our songwriting,” her sister observed that “[f]or the first half of our career, people rarely ever actually talked about our music. Things were so focused on who we were and what we did or didn’t represent that we were sort of allowed to develop as songwriters without too much input on that front.”¹⁵⁸ During this time, licensing became a particularly useful way for them to circumvent the marginalization they encountered with radio programmers and the music press. As Sara Quin explained in an interview for MTV to promote the duo’s contributions as *Awkward*’s guest supervisors, after they released *So Jealous* in 2004 “we got a call from our managers and they said ‘There’s a show that’s going to be, I guess, a really big for the network.’¹⁵⁹ They ended up buying, I guess, seven of our songs for the show.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, Tegan and Sara’s familiarity with music supervision’s utility for enterprising emergent bands predated their participation on *Awkward* in 2013 by several years. Before their appearance as guest supervisors in *Awkward*’s third season, several of their songs had been licensed to teen soaps like *Pretty Little Liars*, *Degrassi*, *One Tree Hill*, *90210*, *Veronica Mars*, and *The Vampire Diaries*, as well as female-led melodramas and comedies like *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Girls*, and *The L-Word*.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ T. Cole. Rachel, “Swing Out, Sisters,” *The Advocate* 1037 (2010): 46.

¹⁵⁹ Given the time period, Sara Quin is most likely referring to ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*, which debuted as a mid-season replacement in March 2005 and was an immediate ratings success for the network. *So Jealous*’s “Where Does the Good Do” was prominently featured in its fourth episode and on the first season’s compilation soundtrack. It is possible that Tegan and Sara were solicited to grant *The L-Word* access to their catalogue which began airing on Showtime in January 2004 and secured a solid viewership early on. *So Jealous*’ title track was licensed to the show, along with “Where Does the Good Go.” However, both songs appeared during the show’s third season, which aired between January and March of 2006 and thus a few years after the events recounted in this anecdote. It also seems unlikely that a niche-oriented subscription-cable dramatic series would have the music budget required to license seven different songs from one album relative to a primetime medical drama on a Disney-owned broadcast network.

¹⁶⁰ “Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors.”

¹⁶¹ Jessica Hopper, “How Selling Out Saved Indie Rock,” *BuzzFeed*, November 10, 2013. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/jessicahopper/how-selling-out-saved-indie-rock#.su3NWAwm0>.

They had also established a relationship with MTV during the mid-2000s by appearing on package programs like *House Band*, a Web series that compiled performance footage, interviews, and videos for up-and-coming artists for the network's sister channel mtvU, which was distributed through conventional cable systems as well as explicitly targeting U.S.-based university and college campuses.¹⁶² Their decisions allowed them to build an audience by aligning themselves with media properties that appealed to a similar fan base in ways that supposedly eluded them on commercial radio and through the press. "I remember getting terrible reviews and [Chicago-based music Web site] Pitchfork saying awful things and thinking, OK, we're not a critic's band, but I think we're a good band," Sara mused in an interview a year after *Heartthrob*'s release before surmising that their influence was most evident in how they marketed themselves by adding, "I think we're good, business-minded people."¹⁶³ It was this populist combination of identity politics and entrepreneurialism that informed the musical and thematic preoccupations of that record, which MTV would help promote through associating the band with *Awkward*'s brand of introspective feminine angst. As Sara explained to *Maclean's* contributor Elio Iannacci, "[w]e are both gay people who are now making pop for everyone. The music is still very personal though; it's about our lives and our relationships, but finding someone to love is tough for all people. For the longest time, I had a hard time meeting someone ... You have to understand, I've had a career since I was 17. I owned a house and paid taxes for it at 26. It was hard meeting someone like me with the same interests."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² "mtvU Unveils Fall '07 Programming Slate," *PR Newswire*, August 27, 2007. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/mtvu-unveils-fall-07-programming-slate-58569637.html>.

¹⁶³ John J. Moser, "Tegan and Sara Enjoying Success of 'Heartthrob,'" *Lehigh Valley Music*, June 22, 2014. <http://blogs.mcall.com/lehighvalleymusic/2014/06/tegan-and-sara-speak-before-levitt-pavilion-steelstacks-show-in-bethlehem.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Elio Iannacci, "Twins Peak," *Maclean's* 126, no. 1 (2013): 39.

Their seventh record, *Heartthrob*, was released in late January of 2013 and enlisted a stable of veteran pop producers, including Greg Kurstin, Warner Bros. music chairman Rob Cavallo, and Mike Elizondo, and drew considerable inspiration from 80s new wave and synthpop acts like Cyndi Lauper, Depeche Mode, Belinda Carlisle, and the Eurythmics. *Spin* critic Jon Young observed this as an artistic departure in his review, noting that “they’ve largely ditched the guitars and cast their lot with slick mainstream hooks.”¹⁶⁵ Though Tegan and Sara developed a considerable following over the course of their career, they believed their priorities shifted considerably during the production of this album. As Tegan Quin told *Rolling Stone*’s Andy Greene, “We plateaued,” and were encouraged by Cavallo and Kurstin to embrace a pop makeover, recalling that “[t]hey were like, ‘What more credibility do you think you’re gonna get? ... You’re good—stop worrying about being credible and fucking make music!’”¹⁶⁶ Rather than a massive departure, *Heartthrob*’s musical direction was more indicative of the act’s gradual integration of pop song craft and electronic flourishes into their folk-punk sound, as well as their willingness to engage in a dialogue with deejays and electronic artists who remixed their music over the years.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, Tegan and Sara built upon their commercial possibilities of their sonic reinvention and professional connections throughout the year. They appeared onstage to perform *Heartthrob*’s lead single, “Closer,” with Taylor Swift during her *Red* world tour and also opened for Katy Perry.¹⁶⁸ They performed Warner Bros.’ Nikon-sponsored South by Southwest showcase, and also licensed *Heartthrob*’s closer, “Shock to Your System” to a

¹⁶⁵ Jon Young, “Tegan and Sara, ‘Heartthrob,’” *Spin*, January 29, 2013. <http://www.spin.com/reviews/tegan-and-sara-heartthrob-reprise/>.

¹⁶⁶ Andy Greene, “Tegan and Sara’s Pop Rebirth,” *Rolling Stone* 1177 (2013): 25.

¹⁶⁷ Iannacci, “Twins Peak”; Scott Mervis, “Pop Go Tegan and Sara,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 18, 2014. <http://www.post-gazette.com/ae/music/2014/06/18/Pop-go-Tegan-and-Sara/stories/201406170177>.

¹⁶⁸ Andy Greenwald, “The Andy Greenwald Podcast: Tegan and Sara,” *Grantland*, February 17, 2014. <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/the-andy-greenwald-podcast-tegan-and-sara/>.

national advertising campaign for electronics company JBL.¹⁶⁹ Finally, they worked with comedy rap group the Lonely Island, composer Mark Mothersbaugh, and veteran song writers Shawn Patterson, Joshua Bartholomew, and Lisa Harriton on *The LEGO Movie* soundtrack. This collaboration was a great success for Warner Bros., WaterTower Music, and Time Warner,¹⁷⁰ netting an Oscar nomination for the film’s satirical theme, “Everything is Awesome.”

Yet MTV was also a player in *Heartthrob*’s promotional cycle. Tegan and Sara were brought on to supervise “Indecent Exposure,” the fifth episode and midpoint of *Awkward*’s third season, which showcased one of the album’s singles. The synergistic directives of this collaboration were supplemented by Ben Hochstein and the music department’s decision to prominently place three different songs from the album in separate episodes during the season’s first half in order to build upon and showcase the pair’s contribution to “Indecent Exposure.” In a *BuzzFeed* feature on indie musicians’ partnerships with advertising agencies, Sara Quin told journalist Jessica Hopper that “[w]hen we started, you could control where your music was or wasn’t, but not that feels impossible ... If people can’t connect that song to you—your name, your face—then it’s all for naught.”¹⁷¹ During *Awkward*’s third season, which began airing on MTV in mid-April, the pair seized the opportunity to dictate how *Heartthrob*’s music would be received and manipulated as a commercial entity, with Warner Bros. placing its three singles “Goodbye, Goodbye,” “I Was a Fool,” and “Closer,” along with album cut “Drove Me Wild.”

The Quin sisters attempted to use their supervision work to signify multiple characters’ perspectives on “Indecent Exposure.”¹⁷² In this episode, Jenna tries to make room in her house

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Hampp, “Selling At South By,” *Billboard* 125, no. 10 (2013): 77-81; Jessica Hopper, “How Selling Out Saved Indie Rock.”

¹⁷⁰ Jason Lipshutz, “‘The Lego Movie’: Why Tegan & Sara Went Chirpy for ‘Everything Is Awesome’ (Video),” *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 17, 2014. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/earshot/video-lego-movie-why-tegan-680761>.

¹⁷¹ Jessica Hopper, “How Selling Out Saved Indie Rock.”

¹⁷² “Indecent Exposure,” *Awkward*, Season 3, Episode 5, May 7, 2013.

for Matty, who briefly moves in with the Hamiltons after his mother objects to her son being sexually active with Jenna. However, they did not choose “Saudade” by Bearcat, a solo act represented by music firm Working Group Artist Management which specializes in sync licensing and television placement for unsigned artists, or “Fever” by Night Panther.¹⁷³ As Tegan explained “It was a difficult spot to fill. Like, I gave four or five suggestions and then Sara tried. And, in the end, we failed. Every song suggestion I made I felt was competing with the dialogue. [To Sara] It was really you that failed.” Sara added, “I almost wish we could take credit for it, but we’re Canadian so we can’t lie ... We did not pick it, but it’s great and it really works.”¹⁷⁴

While the Quin sisters’ collaboration ultimately did not inform the tone of the episode’s initial conflict, their services were put to use in scenes that attempted to shade in and offer nuance to Jenna and Matty’s relationship. Unlike Bethany Cosentino, Tegan and Sara were not filmed working on the production or interacting with the members of the show’s staff for MTV, perhaps due to the recording act’s bicoastal arrangement or the complications that come with coordinating touring and television production schedules, and may emailed in their selections and worked on the episode remotely. Cosentino was also responsible for the selection of one more song than the Quin sisters. Cosentino chose four songs (excluding her own material), while only three of Tegan and Sara’s selections made the cut. “Indecent Exposure” also had fewer song credits overall. “Once Upon a Blog” featured fourteen different songs, while Tegan and Sara’s episode used have as many cues. The rationale for the relative lack of music is difficult to parse, but most likely had to do with the music department needing to stretch its budget across 20 episodes instead of twelve. This included “Redefining Jenna,” season 3A’s finale, which had 25 separate cues that were primarily featured for a climactic art opening sequence with a constant

¹⁷³ “Contact Us,” *Working Management Group Artist Management*. <http://workinggroupmgmt.com/contact-us/>.

¹⁷⁴ “Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors.”

diegetic soundtrack. It may also reveal some randomness on the part of the production to have Tegan and Sara supervise an episode with little dramatic action or spectacle, whereas Cosentino was given a fantasy episode meant to generate interest in season two's finale. Nonetheless, the Quin sisters echoed Cosentino's sentiments and claimed to latch onto the responsibility of selecting lesser-known artists to expose to MTV's viewers. As Tegan put it, "the most exciting part—or the part that I enjoyed the most—was figuring out what artists we could pitch and I'd start to think really outside the box."¹⁷⁵ Sara connected this statement to her own music fandom as a meaningful part of her identity formation during adolescence, adding "the discovery element was what was so impactful for us when we were kids. You know, to hear music you weren't familiar with more so than music you were familiar with."¹⁷⁶

Thus their subsequent comments about the motivation behind particular selections reveal how they made connections between mediated representations of heterosexual romance, professional and familial ties to the music industries, and past reflections on personal experiences with courtship and sex they had as queer teenage girls in creating this episode's soundtrack as recording industry professionals. The pair demonstrated this by using "90210," a fast, bass-driven song by Vancouver-based punk group the Courtney's for a reconciliation scene between Matty and Jenna, as a goodwill gesture for their cousin, drummer Jen Twynn Payne. As Tegan explained, "I am like the proud cousin who constantly drags my friends to her show and I obsessively talk to her about how I want to do a record with her and she's always like, 'Whatever.' She's just too cool for us."¹⁷⁷ The pair seized upon their stint in supervision as an opportunity to collaborate in some capacity with their cousin, even though they were self-

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors."

conscious of the professional implications of giving favorable treatment to extended family members. “As soon as I saw the scene,” Quin added, “I thought—it had this airy California kind of chill vibe to it but it was like still kind of, like, upbeat ... She’s super-cool, so I decided not to tell you guys [the *Awkward* production staff] it was a family member and just see if it just got in the show on its own merits and it did.”¹⁷⁸ The couple’s reconciliation was followed by a scene where the pair attempt to explore their own sexual desires as a couple by watching pornography. For this scene, Tegan and Sara used the instrumental passages of a slinky electronic number entitled “Perpetual Surrender” by DIANA, a Canadian dance trio on the Toronto-based independent label Paper Bag Records.¹⁷⁹ The song is meant to provide ambiance to Jenna and Matty’s erotic play, as the couple commandeer the family room to watch pay-cable pornography while her parents are away. “Indecent Exposure” focuses on the importance of communication and trust to establish sexual and romantic intimacy, which can still lead couples down rough terrain. Matty reveals his crush on Ming after he suggests they watch *Asian Persuasion 9*, which makes Jenna feel insecure. Jenna expresses a preference for *Harry Potter*-themed porn because its silliness may neutralize hardcore’s intense, often degrading representations of unsimulated sex, which she finds disgusting as a young woman. Sara claimed that this scene was “not just about porn. I mean, there’s sort of like a wonderful ... awkward intimacy that’s happening. Actually, I was amazed because I kept thinking, ‘Could I have this conversation with someone I was dating in high school? ... I think it gives a nice breather to that scene.’”¹⁸⁰ While the pair’s ability to empathize with the scene was a requirement of the job, it also required them to treat the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ DIANA, “Perpetual Surrender,” *Perpetual Surrender* (Bloomington, IN: Jagjaguwar/Paper Bag, 2013).

¹⁸⁰ “Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors.”

program's investment in heterosexual romance as something universal that disallows them to tap into their own recollections of being queer teenagers with any specificity.

If "Indecent Exposure" pursues the third season's central thematic question "who do I want to be" by demystifying the glamour and convenience of romantic cohabitation and their embedded gender norms for its principle couple, it also illuminates the ways in which motherhood can be a powerful model and sounding board for identity formation through mentorship, not only for daughters but also for their boyfriends, in part by offering their own parental short-comings as lessons upon which their younger charges can learn. Later that night Jenna finds Matty crying in the bathroom over missing his parents and has him confide in her mother, Lacey (Nikki DeLoach), who encourages him to be the bigger person and initiate reconciliation with his parents. The Quin sisters wanted to privilege her perspective in this scene, and chose "All We Have," by Tulsa-based singer-songwriter Erin Austin, who records under the alias OK Sweetheart in a nod to her associated music scene. "I really like too that the music in this scene almost feels like it could be—like, it's not necessarily what he would listen to," Sara explained, aligning Austin's sentiment about gratitude as a shared resource that is reflected in the composition's dynamic build between verses as a spare piano melody is joined by Austin's voice, a cello, and drums by associating Lacey and not Matty with stately indie folk.¹⁸¹ "[B]ut it seems like it would be maybe more appropriate for the mom and I love that there's this kindness and warmth to the conversation that they're having."¹⁸² They also revealed how they drew on their own mother as inspiration for Lacey. When Tegan claimed that "[y]ou feel like the mom could have put that song on to have the conversation," Sara elaborated "[y]eah, she's like our mom. I'm gonna light some candles and take some deep breaths and I'm going to put this song

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

on.” Tegan completed her sister’s thought by imitating their mother: “You’re going to love them. They’re called ‘OK Sweetheart.’ I gifted you the record.”¹⁸³

Once again, the final scene showcased a *Heartthrob* selection, and thus served aligned the show’s dramatic action with promotion’s commercial imperatives despite the Quin sisters’ protestations that they did not select the song. In addition, the torch song “I Was a Fool” was officially released as the album’s second single nearly two weeks before “Indecent Exposure” aired in early May 2013 and thus sought to engender a sense of momentum for its rotation. The scene maximizes the song’s placement by placing it prominently in the episode’s sonic mix and coordinating the action and editing of the scene with the piano solo that serves as the song’s slow melodramatic introduction. In their interview with MTV, Sara complimented Tegan’s songwriting, noting that “[i]t’s got cool production, so it’s hidden itself as like a contemporary pop song” that could effectively supplement the scene’s tone, which Tegan concurred by noting that “we have, like, intense emotional romantic talking. But then we also have making out. I think it fits ... [but] I almost wanted to bump our song out of it. Like the fact that one our songs was in there, I was like ‘we need to make room for other artists.’”¹⁸⁴ However, despite the Quin sisters’ claims and faint protestations of wanting to bump *Heartthrob*’s second single, their attempts to make room for other artists often worked to serve their album’s promotional campaign and demonstrated the ways in which *Awkward* further distanced Tegan and Sara from its production context and demonstrated their status as “for-hire” labor with valuable brand recognition for MTV. Such strategies represent the limits of such promotional campaigns that seek to tap into such broad appeals toward gender and genre, which would in turn reflect the

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

experiences of *Awkward*'s showrunner, Lauren Iungerich, who was released from the production after the program's third season and her strained relationship with MTV.

Dance All On My Own

Awkward's third season concluded with Jenna taking herself to the prom. After calling things off with Matty to pursue her attraction to fellow creative writing classmate Collin (Nolan Gerard Funk), Jenna finds herself once again confined to another boy's expectations of her and decides to focus on her writing. She turns in her final essay, entitled "Who I Want to Be," which informs the name of the episode and references the key question that the show's writing staff pursued in shaping the season's principle narrative arc. The final sequence features Jenna's creative writing teacher Mr. Hart (Anthony Michael Hall) reading her essay and a few quick intercuts of Jenna's parents and Counselor Marks, but the bulk of the montage focuses on Jenna surveying her classmates, friends, and ex-boyfriends dancing together. Jenna says in voiceover:

I had been struggling to think of what to say, so I stopped thinking. I was convinced I didn't know who I wanted to be, then I realized the answer was all around me. I want to be someone who is willing to forgive. I want to be someone that cares more about others than themselves. I want to be someone who can tell it like it is. I want to be someone who would give up everything for the right reason. I want to be someone who sees the best in everyone. I want to be someone who is a true friend. I want to be someone who always tries to be a better person, and someone who learns from their mistakes. I guess I just want to be someone who encompasses all those things so I can finally be that girl who doesn't need a boy to be happy because I'll know how to dance all on my own.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ "Who I Want to Be," *Awkward*, Season 3, Episode 20, December 17, 2013.

From the sidelines Jenna is able to observe and assign positive attributes to those around her, but also wants to be an active participant in her own life and have her writing be a reflection of that kind of openness. Showrunner Lauren Iungerich noted in an interview that this “final voiceover was truly indicative of how we broke this season ... What an awesome statement that is for girls who tuned into this show for the love triangle, as really, in that moment, Jenna is saying ‘I love myself.’ And it’s not narcissism, but it’s rather self-preservation, of the best kind.”¹⁸⁶ The sequence was also cut to Passion Pit’s “Moth’s Wings,” a song whose funereal imagery and allusions to family tragedy suggest personal transformation through (literal or figurative) suicide, a connection strengthened by lead singer Michael Angelakos’ issues with bipolar disorder and the closet.¹⁸⁷ The song is also meaningful to *Awkward*’s production history, as it was used in the pilot when Jenna relaunches her blog in order to clarify misperception about her own mental health and thus is closely aligned with the protagonist’s identification as a writer and her journey to find and nuance her own authorial voice. Iungerich explained that “when we got it into post, it was my husband [music coordinator Jamie Dooner] who said we should use [the song], and it really says it all: she’s coming full circle.”¹⁸⁸

Iungerich was also talking about herself. In late June 2013, *The Hollywood Reporter* ran an item announcing the showrunner’s departure after completing production on the third season, whose second half was scheduled to air later that October.¹⁸⁹ While Iungerich, who was replaced by Chris Alberghini and Mike Chessler, never explicitly detailed the reasons for her motivation

¹⁸⁶ Myles McNutt, “Cultural Interview: Lauren Iungerich on Writing Her *Awkward*. Finale [Part Two],” *Cultural Learnings*, December 17, 2013. <https://cultural-learnings.com/2013/12/17/cultural-interview-lauren-iungerich-on-writing-her-awkward-finale-part-two/>.

¹⁸⁷ Larry Fitzmaurice, “Cover Story: Passion Pit,” *Pitchfork*, July 19, 2012. <http://pitchfork.com/features/cover-story/8893-rite-of-passion/>; Bret Easton Ellis, “B.E.E. – Michael Angelakos,” *Bret Easton Ellis Podcast*, November 9, 2015. <http://podcastone.com/pg/jsp/program/episode.jsp?programID=592&pid=564095>.

¹⁸⁸ McNutt, “Lauren Iungerich on Writing Her *Awkward*. Finale [Part Two].”

¹⁸⁹ Lesley Goldberg, “MTV’s ‘Awkward’ Creator Lauren Iungerich Exits,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 26, 2013. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/awkward-creator-lauren-iungerich-exits-575714>.

to leave the program, she did align herself with her protagonist and alter ego by claiming it to be “a decision of self-preservation ... I’m really grateful to MTV ... that they let me out of my contract (which wasn’t done), and I’m grateful to them not only for putting the show on the air and giving me the opportunity to have the best job I’ve ever had, but also to let me leave when I needed to leave.”¹⁹⁰ Her decision was most likely influenced by personnel change within MTV during her five years of employment with the channel. By the time Iungerich announced her departure, many of MTV’s executives and programming staff had already left. Included in that number was series development and programming executive vice president David Janollari, who originally greenlit *Awkward* and brought it to series. According to Iungerich this climate gave her more creative autonomy, which was compromised by the new regime. “The philosophy has changed internally at the network,” Iungerich explained. “[W]hen I got over there it was young artists like me—I had only staffed once but had sold a bunch of pilots—could not only get a pilot made but could be given the keys to the kingdom and run their show single-handedly.”¹⁹¹

Janollari was subsequently replaced by Susanne Daniels, a television industry veteran who shepherded *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson’s Creek* for the WB and acquired *Project Runway* from Bravo for Lifetime before joining MTV in November of 2012.¹⁹² While there may have not been a direct conflict between Daniels and Iungerich, Daniels’ mandate to bring in more male viewers was certainly reflected in *Awkward*’s fourth season under Alberghini and Chessler, which made Matty more of a co-protagonist by centering the show’s principle storyline for that run around the character finding his biological father.¹⁹³ Such narrative decisions were subtly

¹⁹⁰ Myles McNutt, “Cultural Interview: Lauren Iungerich on Writing Her *Awkward*. Finale [Part One],” *Cultural Learnings*, December 17, 2013. <https://cultural-learnings.com/2013/12/17/cultural-interview-lauren-iungerich-on-the-end-of-her-awkward-journey-part-one/>.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Lacey Rose, “Susanne Daniels,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 420, no. 14 (2014): 24-25.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

reflected in the show's music cues. While the music department licensed a number of songs by female artists, they did not enlist musicians to serve as guest supervisors or extend their pre-existing relationships with Tegan and Sara or Bethany Cosentino, whose band Best Coast released *California Nights*, *The Only Place*'s follow-up, in May 2015. They also made more of an effort to acquire selections from all-male rock bands that supplemented Matty's perspective.

However, such developments were short-lived. By August 2015, Daniels announced that she was leaving MTV to develop original programming for YouTube. *Billboard*'s Robert Levine connected this maneuver to the channel's primetime ratings weathering a 40-percent drop in viewers between the ages of 12 and 34 for nearly five years as a result of having to compete with streaming services for their audience's attention.¹⁹⁴ In addition, MTV Networks Music and Logo Group president Van Toffler allowed his contract to lapse while he developed his own media company and more than 200 MTV employees were fired.¹⁹⁵ The verdict was simple, according to a former MTV programming executive who was quoted anonymously: "[t]he audience is going digital, reality TV is running dry, [and] there's more competition for scripted programs."¹⁹⁶ The ubiquitous presence of compilation soundtracks in scripted content was at once a hallmark of MTV's influence upon music's mediation in television and film from the 1980s on and a liability for a channel who could not afford to shoulder the production costs of scripted programming and the music budgets built into them. MTV attempted to have it both ways. Daniels launched *The Shannara Chronicles*, a *Game of Thrones*-style recombinant based on novelist Terry Brooks' young adult series that was a clear attempt on MTV's part to compete with big-budget cable dramas. Though the series enlisted a music department that included veteran supervisor

¹⁹⁴ Robert Levine, "MTV's New, New Reality," *Billboard* 127, no. 21 (2015): 22-24.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Levine, "More Turmoil at MTV," *Billboard* 127, no. 23 (2015): 10.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Madonna Wade-Reed, the program relied upon an original score as well as integrated a handful of folk songs mainly available through the public domain that the department could use at minimal cost to the production due to the lack of reliance upon copyrighted material. In an effort to compete with its chief business rival, MTV also ordered six episodes of *Todrick*, an unscripted documentary series about YouTube celebrity Todrick Hall that aired in fall 2015 and depicted Hall and his team's creation of original viral videos under ownership by the show's production company, Brian Graden Media, and Hall's manager, Scooter Braun.¹⁹⁷ MTV also partnered Hall, a queer viral pop star, with drag queen RuPaul on a Christmas variety show for Logo TV.¹⁹⁸ The channel also enjoyed success with Janollari's first acquisition, *Teen Wolf*, which was renewed for its sixth season in summer 2015 due to solid ratings and received a nomination from the Guild of Music Supervisors for Laura Webb's work on season five.¹⁹⁹

What this meant for *Awkward*, Iungerich, and the channel's relationship with female independent musicians was decidedly murkier. Under Alberghini and Chessler's stewardship, the show was renewed for a fifth and final season in 2014 and was broken up into two parts during fall 2015 and spring 2016 to document the ensemble's high school graduation and college transition.²⁰⁰ Iungerich partnered with producer Jerry Bruckheimer and signed a put pilot deal

¹⁹⁷ Cynthia Littleton, "YouTube's Todrick Hall Sets MTV Unscripted Series," *Variety*, October 22, 2014. <http://variety.com/2014/tv/news/mtv-todrick-hall-youtube-broke-a-game-show-1201336366/>; Lesley Goldberg, "MTV Adds Game Show, Todrick Hall Docuseries From Scooter Braun," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 22, 2014. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/mtv-adds-game-show-todrick-742820>.

¹⁹⁸ Diego James, "Watch: RuPaul & Todrick Hall Sing 'Deck the Halls,'" *Out*, December 12, 2015. <http://www.out.com/popnography/2015/12/10/watch-rupaul-todrick-hall-sing-deck-halls>.

¹⁹⁹ Elizabeth Wagmeister, "'Teen Wolf' Renewed for Season 6 at MTV," *Variety*, July 9, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/teen-wolf-season-6-renewed-1201537403/>; Steve Chagollan, "Guild of Music Supervisors Announce Noms for Sixth Awards Ceremony," *Variety*, December 17, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/music/news/guild-of-music-supervisors-reveal-noms-for-2015-1201664260/>.

²⁰⁰ Andy Swift, "MTV's *Awkward* to End After Season 5," *TV Line*, October 8, 2014. <http://tvline.com/2014/10/08/awkward-cancelled-season-5-renewed-ending/>.

with ABC for the series *Couch Detective*, which remains in development.²⁰¹ The Quin sisters extended the reach of *Heartthrob*'s commercial life with placements on programs like Netflix's *BoJack Horseman* and recorded a cover of The Rolling Stones' "Fool to Cry" as an exclusive for the compilation soundtrack that accompanied HBO's *Girls*, which also appeared in two separate episodes during the show's second and third seasons.²⁰² As for Cosentino, five of *The Only Place*'s eleven songs appeared in a variety of programs, including *Arrow*, *Parenthood*, *666 Park Avenue*, and *So You Think You Can Dance*. In addition, two of *California Nights*' songs were used on *Made in Chelsea*. Though *Awkward*'s music department did not abandon female indie rock artists, their lessened significance in signposting the protagonist's subjectivity revealed the precarity at the root of musicians' reliance upon "a good song and a good scene" to find an audience through television's supervision practices, which unevenly benefitted Cosentino and the Quin sisters by heavily relying upon licensing to build up brand recognition the guest supervision stints on *Awkward* cannily exploited to promote *Crazy for You* and *Heartthrob*.

This chapter argues that music supervision, a practice within the television industry that synchronizes licensed music with visual media, asynchronously values musicians' labor. While supervisors often frame synchronization licensing as valuable exposure for emerging talent through strategic placement, such practices frequently rely on undervaluing recordings through diminished licensing fees that require musicians to saturate the market with multiple placements in lieu of releasing singles and videos in a television and music economy that no longer sustains such promotional strategies. Such devaluation potentially places female indie rock and electronic

²⁰¹ Nellie Andreeva, "ABC Buys Comedic Mystery from Lauren Iungerich, Jerry Bruckheimer as Put Pilot," *Deadline*, September 8, 2014. <http://deadline.com/2014/09/lauren-iungerich-jerry-bruckheimer-mystery-series-abc-put-pilot-831338/>.

²⁰² Chris Martins, "Tegan and Sara Pep Up the Rolling Stones' 'Fool to Cry' for HBO's 'Girls,'" *Spin*, January 9, 2013. <http://www.spin.com/2013/01/tegan-and-sara-rolling-stones-fool-to-cry-girls-show/>.

artists in a precarious position, especially since composition jobs are disproportionately assigned to their male counterparts, and thus requires them to place widely to break even. Similarly, MTV is historically ambivalent toward female viewers, preferring to cater to young men in its programming and promotional decisions even though adolescent girls and young women comprise a substantial portion of the channel's viewer base. Thus MTV's *Awkward*, which employed a female showrunner and licensed several female musicians' recordings in its first few seasons to reflect its girl protagonist's perspective, is a useful case study for examining placement's value for female artists whose recordings serve to augment the storytelling of television programs shepherded by female showrunners. The channel's decision to hire on female indie musicians as guest supervisors sought to strengthen its appeals to female viewers and, by extension, creative talent working in the television and music industries by using their involvement as a promotional vehicle for their music while giving them the opportunity to place other lesser-known female artists whose work they admired. Yet Cosentino's and the Quin sisters' participation revealed supervision's uneven appraisal of recordings by creating a production context in which they were able to roll out their new records through multiple placements that were not granted to the female artists whose work they supervised. Such discordant practices limited Cosentino and the Quin sisters' abilities to more meaningfully engage and potentially challenge supervisors' devaluation of indie musicians' labor that would allow their work to be showcased in a way that could offer more than the hollow promise of exposure to the female peers while elevating their work as a reward for their faith in the business of music placement. The ideological underpinnings at work in the synchronization of recordings on cable television also shape the politics of their reuse, as the next chapter demonstrates.

Chapter Four

Selling Your Records: Reusing Pop Stardom on *RuPaul's Drag Race*

In “RuPaul’s Hair Extravaganza,” a season three episode of Logo TV’s competition-based reality program *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, contestants Shangela Laquifa Wadley and Alexis Mateo lip synced to *American Idol* winner Fantasia Barrino’s “Even Angels.” According to host RuPaul, they gave a poor showing during the episode’s main challenge and had to face off in a lip sync contest, the program’s primary eliminatory mechanism. Both performed in front of Barrino, who was a guest judge. They signified her performance through mimesis to demonstrate their identification with “Even Angels.” They related to the song as reality show competitors required to exceed the judges’ expectations in a high-pressure environment and as drag artists who repurpose musicians’ work for lip sync, vogue, and celebrity impersonation contests. In a talking head segment, competitor Manila Luzon expressed the fusion of these expectations and telegraphed Mateo’s win, stating that “Shangela is doing the best she can, but Alexis is feeling it with her body and it’s timeless and beautiful.”¹ Finally, Wadley was the lone black competitor and Mateo was one of two Puerto Rican queens competing in the episode’s hair show, a pageant associated with African- and Latin-American cultural traditions. Thus, they implicitly identified with Barrino’s status as a singer associated with R&B, a racially marked genre.

The song’s presence required coordinated recording and television industry labor. Barrino’s label J Records did not release “Even Angels” as a single, but allowed its use on television. In 2010, Barrino performed it on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. J Records’ parent company Sony Music Entertainment also licensed it to Logo’s overseer, Viacom Media Networks. To acquire the licensing rights, *Drag Race*’s production company, World of Wonder,

¹ “RuPaul’s Hair Extravaganza,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 11, March 28, 2011.

enlisted its clearance supervisor to get approval from members of *Drag Race*'s staff as well as Sony's and Viacom's licensing and talent departments.² In addition, Barrino's appearance was a form of synergy for World of Wonder and Viacom. A year before *Drag Race*'s third season, Barrino was the subject of *Fantasia For Real*, a World of Wonder documentary series for VH1 which chronicled her work on *Back to Me*, the album on which "Even Angels" appears.³

This moment illustrates how music is an essential feature on *Drag Race*. It is facilitated through licensing, a practice that allows an entity to use copyrighted material with permission from the copyright holder. *Drag Race* represents the industrial and cultural significance of popular recordings by treating this queer subcultural form as analogous to pop music stardom. First, the show features RuPaul's accomplishments as a professional singer, which contestants are expected to mirror. Every season requires contestants to interpret RuPaul's music on stage, in the studio, and as video subjects. Second, it equates the host's oeuvre with the work of the primarily female recording artists who mentor contestants as guest judges. Finally, along with the show's efforts to use popular songs that correspond with or comment upon individual challenges or themes,⁴ the production licenses many of these performers' music as resources through which cast members distinguish themselves in various challenges and lip sync contests.

To support such claims, this chapter evaluates *Drag Race*'s music-related challenges from the show's first six seasons. Consideration for the show's production practices and textual representations reveal how television and recording industry professionals reuse pop recordings in order to construct queer subjects for reality television by privileging drag's more commercial-friendly permutations. This ultimately strengthens the show's equivalencies between drag and

² Mona Card, "Personal Interview," July 15, 2014.

³ Romeo San Vicente, "Fantasia Gets Real For VH1," *Between the Lines* 1719, no. 611 (2009): 34.

⁴ Card, "Personal Interview."

pop stardom by producing some performers who can parlay their talents into individual recording careers after the show. The textual representation of such equivalences within the show relies extensively on licensed music, particularly through producer World of Wonder's endeavors to clear songs from various publishers and record labels with Viacom's assistance.

However, this chapter analyzes the contestants' musical labor instead of the off-screen labor that goes into clearance and placement, as cast members rely upon licensing's enactment before they compete on the program. Thus, this chapter is concerned with how contestants use and recycle musical recordings, specifically from cisgender female vocalists and RuPaul, to rocket themselves to pop stardom. This is often accomplished through cast members' skills with related creative practices like impersonation, parody, and remix that mobilize drag's reliance upon imitation, reference, and quotation as resources from which to synthesize new performance styles. Yet in the context of competition-based reality programming, *Drag Race* assumes that only certain performers can correctly draw upon other people's work in the service of their own careers. This chapter observes that such labor relies on contestants' compliance with the licensed use of recording artists' music in the context of the eliminatory lip sync battles, as well as challenges that reward contestants' abilities as vocalists and songwriters on original compositions. While these challenges are frequently framed as contributions to RuPaul's music, they often demonstrate which contestants can use the host's music and the visiting recording artists' professional mentorship as resources for their own pop careers. It argues that such professional advancement is often bestowed upon white and light-skinned contestants at the expense of their dark-skinned counterparts, who often weather racial conflicts with the show's network of professional musicians and must win lip sync battles in order to stay on the show.

Start Your Engines

Pop recordings' industrial functions structure *Drag Race*'s representation of drag culture. To understand how, the show must be contextualized within scholarly discourses around reality programming's representational strategies and neoliberalism's influence upon competition-based reality television's depictions of musicians' labor. Jonathan Kraszewski and Vicki Mayer note race, gender, and sexuality's influence upon reality television editors' and casting directors' work.⁵ Mayer applies terms like "producer" and "creativity" to casters, a field largely populated by straight women and gay men, to describe their development of "contests, events, and marketing schemes to *buy access* to those desirable participants who could stand for both the program's talent and its preferred audience."⁶ Their contributions meaningfully affect reality programs' mediation of queer people, which Ron Becker and Steve Cohan investigate in their analyses of gay masculinity's negotiations with heteronormativity and capitalism in makeover shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.⁷ Yet such programming often place queer subjects in relation to the heterosexual men they rehabilitate, while *Drag Race* focuses on a queer art form's practitioners and builds upon Logo TV's previous efforts to represent various queer communities with dramas like *Noah's Arc* and travelogue programs like *Round Trip Ticket*.⁸

Yet drag is built upon sexuality's volatile intersection with race and gender. Judith Butler claims that drag performance simultaneously appropriates and subverts "racist, misogynist, and

⁵ Jon Kraszewski, "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2004): 179-196; Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁶ Mayer, *Below the Line*, 104.

⁷ Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Steven Cohan, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guise: Camp, Postfeminism, and the Fab Five's Makeovers of Masculinity," in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, 176-200. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

⁸ Aslinger, "Creating a Network for Queer Audiences at Logo TV," *Popular Communication* 7, no. 2 (2009): 107-121.

homophobic forms of oppression.”⁹ Foundational activities like lip syncing, dance battles, and celebrity impersonation centralize mimesis and appropriation as drag artists’ resources for creative expression. Such traditions demonstrate negotiated racial and gender representations embedded in queens’ ambivalent play with pop divas’ iconography. These practices are also vulnerable to mainstream appropriation. For instance, Madonna referenced dance battles in her 1990 hit “Vogue” and its music video, which featured dancers who originated the practice in the New York club scene. “Vogue” also obviated dance battles’ origins within gay Latin and African-American communities through depoliticized lyrical appeals to inclusion.¹⁰ Such tensions suffuse José Esteban Muñoz’s decision to compare RuPaul’s mid-90s VH1 talk show with Vaginal Cream Davis’s performance art. According to Muñoz, Davis’s fusion of blackface minstrelsy with Angela Davis’s radicalism unearthed “the nation’s internal terrors around race, gender, and sexuality” by conjuring the United States’ “most dangerous citizens . . . black welfare queen hookers.”¹² As a result, Davis asserts racially marked drag queen prostitutes as “a fixture of urban capitalism,” a descriptor Roderick Ferguson employs to argue that such figures symbolize “a larger black culture as it has engaged various economic and social formations. That engagement has borne a range of alienations, each estrangement securing another: her racial difference is inseparable from her sexual incongruity, her gender eccentricity, and her class marginality.”¹³ By contrast, when discussing RuPaul’s mid-90s VH1 talk show Muñoz dismisses the transformative potential of her celebrity for queer communities, claiming that “this ‘boom’ in

⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge), 128.

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press: New York, 1992).

¹¹ *Drag Race*’s use of the song in a season four lip sync contest—which former Warner Bros. licensing representative Megan Goldstein helped facilitate—could be read as an effort to reclaim voguing from Madonna’s cultural appropriation and mainstreaming of the subcultural practice.

¹² José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 108.

¹³ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations In Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1.

drag helps one understand that a liberal-pluralist mode of political strategizing only eventuates a certain absorption and nothing like a productive engagement with difference.”¹⁴ *Drag Race* similarly struggles to articulate a radical politics of difference within queer communities because of its belief that pop stardom is the springboard for drag queens’ professional ascendance. RuPaul and many contestants identify as poor, racially marked survivors of homophobia. Yet *Drag Race* often depicts the host and successful cast mates distancing themselves from these origins in order to comply with reality television’s prizing of individual achievement and marketable cultural difference. This is accomplished, in part, by prioritizing glamour. Signified by couture gowns, elaborate (and frequently blonde) coiffures, luminous skin, slender figures, and the soignée carriage of old Hollywood and Parisian runways, glamour is integral to RuPaul’s brand and thus a regulatory tool. Such ideals can stymie camp- or punk-influenced queens,¹⁵ yet those contestants often use their subcultural identification as branding strategies. Such music-based image management and enterprising is not as accessible to cast members who are dark-skinned, large-bodied, transgender, multilingual, or hail from poor rural and urban communities.

Many scholars challenge normative and regressive aspects of the show’s depictions of drag culture. In her analysis of the show’s first season, Eir-Anne Edgar asserts *Drag Race*’s limited representation of drag performance by noting that contestants “must successfully fulfill assigned tasks that demonstrate various femininities, such as sewing or performing a choreographed dance routine.”¹⁶ Though contestants can “play with gender attributes and expectations,” it is ultimately their ability to perform a variety of “femininities that is rewarded

¹⁴ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 99.

¹⁵ J. Bryan Lowder, “Does *RuPaul’s Drag Race* Have a Camp Problem?,” *Slate*, February 27, 2013. http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/02/27/drag_race_grey_gardens_and_jinx_monsoon_why_the_queens_need_camp.html/.

¹⁶ Eir-Anne Edgar, “Xtravaganza!: Drag Representation and Articulation in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (2011): 139.

through these competitions and challenges.”¹⁷ As a result, some cast members’ struggle to with certain acts like tucking, a slang term that describes cisbodied men’s methods for hiding their genitalia to pass as women. This strengthens Laurie Norris’s claim that the show’s initial diverse casting decisions eventually gave way to a preponderance of “fishy” (or conventionally feminine) contestants at the expense of presenting a broader spectrum of drag and sidelining the show’s few trans contestants.¹⁸ Competitors’ uneven allocation of power also stems from racial essentialism. In their analysis of the third season, Sabrina Strings and Long T. Bui focus on the conflicts between two cliques.¹⁹ A group of fair-skinned Latin and mixed-race Asian contestants led by season winner Raja dubbed themselves the Heathers, a reference to Michael Lehmann’s 1989 film about a vicious group of popular teenagers. They also derisively referred to a quartet of racially marked Southern and Puerto Rican contestants as “Boogers.”²⁰ The host, judges, and producers exploited this rivalry by forcing the black and brown cast members to comply with definitions of racial authenticity predicated on “staying ‘true’ to one’s off-stage ethnic/racial identity, a requirement not enforced for the white and Asian characters on the show.”²¹ As a result, African American contestant Shangela Laquifa Wadley won a comedy challenge by playing a cross-dressing pimp character.²² Puerto Rican-born Alexis Mateo expressed frustration toward the judges’ request that she show “personality” by caricaturizing her heritage in challenges for comedic effect.²³ This aligns with Libby Anthony’s and R. Gabriel Mayora’s

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Laurie Norris, “Of Fish and Feminists: Homonormative Misogyny and the Trans*Queen,” in *The Makeup of RuPaul’s Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems, 31-48 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers).

¹⁹ Sabrina Strings and Long T. Bui, “‘She Is Not Acting, She Is’: The Conflict Between Gender and Racial Realness on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 5 (2013): 1-15.

²⁰ Madeliene Davies, “*RuPaul’s Drag Race* Takes a Page Out of *Heathers*,” *Gawker*, March 1, 2011. <http://gawker.com/5773538/rupauls-drag-race-takes-a-page-out-of-heathers>.

²¹ Strings and Bui, “‘She Is Not Acting, She Is,’” 2.

²² Ibid., 4.

²³ Ibid., 6.

critiques against the show's marginalization of multilingual contestants, especially Latin American cast members who struggle with a variety of linguistic and cultural barriers.²⁴ While arguably the Heathers' identification with a film about a clique of white teenage girls as people of color complicates Strings and Bui's critique against the production's manipulation of racial essentialism for dramatic purposes, it does indicate how light-skinned, mixed-race contestants are able to traverse racial boundaries in ways that their racially marked counterparts cannot. For example, elsewhere in the season contestants Raja and runner-up Manila Luzon "fared well when they took on the tropes of the racial 'Other'" by appropriating Native American iconography and Orientalist stereotypes in runway and performance challenges, which they were permitted to do by the judges because of their mixed-race Asian heritage.²⁵

Such developments affirm Hunter Hargraves's observation that the show insists that contestants of color comply with neoliberal and post-racial discourses around personal accomplishment that essentialize and obscure their cultural differences.²⁶ Mary Beltrán arrives at similar conclusions in her analysis of pop star Jennifer Lopez, arguing that celebrities of color draw upon their ethnicity to create personal narratives to bolster their image yet must resolve any potential market instability by making themselves commercially palatable and profitable.²⁷ In her analysis on branding's relationship to contemporary female pop stardom, Kristin Lieb outlines marketing firms' "personification tactics" to create pop stars who are "likeable; have a voice;

²⁴ Libby Anthony, "Dragging with an Accent: Linguistic Stereotypes, Language Barriers, and Translingualism" in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2014): 49-66; R. Gabriel Mayora, "Cover, Girl: Branding Puerto Rican Drag in 21st-Century U.S. Popular Culture," in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2014): 106-123.

²⁵ Strings and Bui, "She Is Not Acting, She Is," 8.

²⁶ Hunter Hargraves, "You Better Work: The Commodification of HIV in *RuPaul's Drag Race*," *Spectator* 31, no. 2 (2011): 24-34.

²⁷ Mary C. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

exhibit diversity; [are] memorable; experience conflict; and appear deviant, but not too deviant.”²⁸ Many contestants similarly take up more conventional forms of drag and increasingly aspire toward brand-friendly pop stardom in order to model themselves after RuPaul’s image as a seasoned, glamorous entertainer.²⁹ This also aligns with Sarah Banet-Weiser’s discussion of self-branding and postfeminist female celebrity online. Banet-Weiser argues that self-branding is seen as authentic and “not as an imposition of a concept or product by corporate culture but rather as the individual taking on the project herself as a way to access her ‘true’ self,” which makes her “publicly legible in the surrounding brand culture.”³⁰ But such legibility is unevenly bestowed upon white and light-skinned contestants who can reuse recordings to serve their own self-branding as pop stars. Some contestants enjoy thriving careers, including Laotian-American queen Jujubee, African-American competitors Latrice Royale and Wadley, and Puerto Rican contestant and internationally renowned club deejay Nina Flowers. However, many of them either hail from industrial hubs like Los Angeles and New York before they appeared on *Drag Race* or relocate afterward to capitalize on their associations with the program. The same degree of visibility and access is not evenly distributed among contestants of color as it is with many of the white- and light-skinned queens. These tensions inform *Drag Race*’s representation of lip syncing and other musical activities, contestants’ different competencies with them, and RuPaul’s identification with female recording artists who use the show to promote their music.

Finally, *Drag Race*’s adoption of competition programming’s entrenched neoliberalism—the ideological belief of a self-regulating free market that strengthens the private

²⁸ Kristin J. Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry: The Social Construction of Female Popular Music Stars* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 32-33.

²⁹ Carolyn Chernoff, “Of Women and Queens: Gendered Realities and Re-Education in RuPaul’s Drag Empire” in *The Makeup of RuPaul’s Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2014): 148-167.

³⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser. *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 61.

sector's economic power—reinforces the genre's representation of creative labor by making aspiring professionals “more dependent on markets and employers, thereby increasing the need for people to accept work on the terms on which it is offered.”³¹ *Drag Race* parodies competition-based reality programming's many tropes. Nicholas de Villiers claims that “RuPaul's multiple personas offer a kind of metacommentary on talent contest reality television conventions and specifically the roles of Tyra Banks and Tim Gunn from *America's Next Top Model* and *Project Runway*.”³² According to de Villiers, such references are recontextualized by the show's frequent gestures toward texts like Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning*, a canonical documentary about New York drag culture.³³ But *Drag Race* ultimately complies with capitalism, an ideology foundational to both competition-based reality programming and pop stardom.³⁴ In season one, *Drag Race* commodified AIDS activism by seizing upon sponsor MAC Cosmetics and contestant Ongina's HIV-positive status as endorsement opportunities.³⁵ Mary Marcel and Kai Kohlsdorf argue that the program's frequent product placement compromises drag by rewarding contestants for being corporate mouthpieces.³⁶ Candace Moore recognizes similar dependencies in her analysis of Foursquare's sponsorship of Logo's Web site, which included a banner ad with travel tips from *Drag Race*'s contestants to encourage viewers to

³¹ Matt Stahl, *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and The Politics Of Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 41.

³² Nicholas De Villiers, “RuPaul's *Drag Race* as Meta-Reality Television,” *Jump Cut* 54 (2012): <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/deVilRuPaul/index.html/>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-Welfare Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Kristin J. Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry: The Social Construction of Female Popular Music Stars* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

³⁵ Hargraves, “You Better Work.”

³⁶ Mary Marcel, “Representing Gender, Race, and Realness: The Television World of America's Next Drag Superstars,” in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2014): 13-30; Kai Kohlsdorf, “Policing the Proper Queer Subject: RuPaul's *Drag Race* in the Neoliberal ‘Post’ Moment,” in *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows*, ed. Jim Daems (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2014): 67-87.

develop user profiles.³⁷ However, as stand-ins for Logo TV's audience, *Drag Race* contestants frequently express themselves as fans of RuPaul and cisgender female solo artists whose anthems of resistance, perseverance, and self-preservation underscore their obstacles with coming out, familial abuse and estrangement, the spectre of AIDS, and the promise of drag as a home as well as a stepping stone. This chapter considers the intersectional politics of gay male fandom toward pop divas on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, a competition-based reality show on LGBT-oriented channel Logo TV, through the presence of cisgender female vocalists as professional mentors and licensed recordings for its eliminatory lip sync contests alongside host and producer RuPaul's use of drag culture as a catapult for pop stardom as regulatory features for drag culture's professionalization. Such uses of pop music reinforce Richard Dyer's claim that gay men's disco fandom results from "[t]he anarchy of capitalism [that] throws up commodities that an oppressed group can take up and use to cobble together its own culture It is a 'contrary' use of what the dominant culture provides, it is important in forming a gay identity, and it has subversive potential as well as reactionary implications."³⁸ Thus fans' generic affiliations are not innocent. Alice Echols observes that disco's formation relied upon the intersection between gay masculinity and urban black and Latino communities, but that its mainstreaming relied on urban, class-mobile gay white men cordoned it off for themselves through expensive members-only night clubs.³⁹ By contrast, both British and American punk played with volatile signifiers of white supremacy and white trash culture, including the appropriation of fascist and Confederate

³⁷ Candace Moore, "Distribution Is Queen: LGBTQ Media on Demand." *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 1 (2013): 137-144.

³⁸ Richard Dyer, "In Defense of Disco," *Gay Left: A Gay Socialist Journal* 8 (1979): 21.

³⁹ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

iconography, as a way to express class anxiety and shock mainstream audiences.⁴⁰ Such conflicts over co-optation and essentialism play out in *Drag Race*'s engagement with popular music.

Drag exploits “the anarchy of capitalism” by drawing upon the iconography of popular culture through appropriation, mimesis, and parody. In particular, queens take up the images, voices, and recordings of female pop stars. According to Jane Gaines, such aspects of celebrity are treated as property by U.S. copyright law but are inconsistently granted ownership by individual authors and corporate enterprises.⁴¹ Thus drag’s subversive potential and reactionary implications often play with and occasionally challenge copyright debates over ownership and likeness. These aspects are enhanced by the show’s lip sync contests and the music-based challenges, which attempt to use a commercial medium to represent a subcultural milieu. The program’s appeals to music as a resource for queer subjects’ self-empowerment evokes Derek Johnson’s notion of “enfranchisement,”⁴² particularly with regard to how contestants use licensed material within cross-industry formations to distinguish themselves in music-based challenges or redeem themselves with lip sync contests. Thus this chapter’s reflects on how these contestants occupy “the contradictory positions offered to and taken up by consumers” that exist within these television and recording industries in the context of this program through the use and reuse of musical recordings for professional purposes.⁴³

Ultimately, *Drag Race*'s representations of drag culture conform to competition-based reality programming’s requirement that individuals vie for a limited reserve of cash prizes,

⁴⁰ Gayle Wald, “One of the Boys? Whiteness, Gender, and Popular Music Studies,” in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 151-167; Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, “What Is ‘White Trash’? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor Whites in the United States,” in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997): 168-184.

⁴¹ Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁴² Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 199.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

endorsed gifts, and the promise of professional advancement, as well as navigate the recording industry's copyright protection laws and corporate parentage structures that impact the conditions of music licensing. Scholars note copyright's effect upon programs like *American Idol* and its representation of the contemporary recording industry.⁴⁴ For example, during season seven *Idol* contestants were required to develop a program from Dolly Parton's discography. The country singer served as a mentor. In addition, the program drew heavily from her output with Sony-owned record labels RCA and Columbia, assumedly because these were the selections that the program's music department could clear. In this regard, *Idol*'s and *Drag Race*'s dependence upon licensing as a resource for contestants' creative expression resembles sampling, an integral musical practice within the recording industry wherein musicians use recordings as raw material for original work. In their analysis of hip-hop production, Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola recognize that "even in a culture based on musical borrowing, there were still norms of originality, authorship, and ownership," that made rappers and producers vulnerable to litigation following the genre's commercial success in the late 1980s.⁴⁵ Similarly, these programs use up to one-and-a-half minutes of a recording—usually the first verse, chorus, and bridge—and typically pay record labels \$15-20 thousand in licensing fees per selection.⁴⁶

Matt Stahl observes that *American Idol*'s "social and cultural power do not derive just from grooming performers and selling recordings and associated commodities . . . but also from the program's development and distribution of compelling stories about what it means to be a pop singer."⁴⁷ By focusing on *American Idol*'s audition process, Stahl explores "the symbolic

⁴⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Stahl, *Unfree Masters*.

⁴⁵ Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola, *Creative License: The Law and Culture of Digital Sampling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 66.

⁴⁶ Card, "Personal Interview."

⁴⁷ Stahl, *Unfree Masters*, 37.

and social figure of the recording artist through the juxtaposition of cultural and political-economic analyses.”⁴⁸ Stahl’s considers musicians as workers in order “to draw out the specific significance of the recording artist both as object of fantasy, identification, and commerce and as skilled working subject integrated into legal and economic structures.”⁴⁹ But he also considers musicians as workers in order “to foreground popular music as a social and symbolic field of unique conceptual value in the early twenty-first century.”⁵⁰ He applies Carole Pateman’s “unfree masters,” a term she used to discuss husbands’ role in a market society, to musicians in order “to accentuate the paradoxical position of the professional recording artist” who must balance creative talent with entrepreneurial acumen.⁵¹ Stahl also draws from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of “public esteem,” a form of social hierarchization facilitated by “musical performance as both the preeminent site of distinction and the first act of social mobility” to his analysis of *Idol*’s representation of music’s labor conditions.⁵² Contestants are humiliated when they fail the audition process and authenticated through elaborate back stories that make them relatable to the show’s audience when they do well.⁵³ This process “suggests that *American Idol*’s pedagogical narratives of authentication and humiliation shore up liberal-democratic promises of voice and self-actualization in a society in which such promises are fulfilled on unequal terms.”⁵⁴ *Drag Race* contestants similarly demonstrate humiliation and authentication during the show’s music-related challenges and lip sync contests.

Since its first season, music has been integral to *RuPaul’s Drag Race*’s representation of drag culture. The show has consistently compared drag to commercial pop stardom. Each season

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

⁵² Ibid., 35.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

includes challenges for contestants to demonstrate their potential as recording artists. In every cycle, finalists appear in the new music video for the fortuitously timed release of RuPaul's latest single. Multiple episodes also have popular female musicians serve as professional mentors for the contestants, and their music is frequently licensed for the program's lip sync contests. In addition, RuPaul enlists professionals like producer Lucian Piane and veteran recording artist and radio personality Michelle Visage to delegate how the show's contestants use drag to accommodate RuPaul's definitions of pop stardom. Visage's opinion increasingly came to matter after she joined *Drag Race* as a judge during season three, and served as the master of ceremonies for the show's U.S. and international *Battle of the Seasons* tours.⁵⁵ During the first half of the show's run, contestants staged lip sync and live performances of RuPaul's and guest judges' previous recordings. But by the fourth season the program prioritized contestants' abilities to collaborate on the host's new musical projects.⁵⁶ Such shifts reflect former cast members' efforts to align themselves with the recording industry, a development that intensified after the third season. It also allowed the program to circumvent commercial music licensing's financial and legal restraints by using challenges as spaces for contestants to create works that were then owned by World of Wonder and RuCo, Inc.

This chapter analyzes six of the program's music-related challenges across as many seasons in order to map this shift. First it evaluates the show's second episode, which required contestants to split off into two girl groups and perform an original lip sync routine to songs by R&B group Destiny's Child. It then compares the next two seasons' stage challenges. Season

⁵⁵ RuPaul and Michelle Visage, "Recapping ... The Finale!," *What's the Tee?*, June 3, 2015. <http://www.rupaulpodcast.com/episodes/2015/6/3/episode-31-recappingthe-finale>.

⁵⁶ In RuPaul's 1995 memoir, the drag queen states that "You can call me he. You can call me she. You can call me *Regis and Kathie Lee*; I don't care! Just as long as you call me." Yet despite such appeals to fluidity, the host also self-identifies as a gay man both in and out of drag, so I will be using male pronouns when addressing him. See: RuPaul *Lettin' It All Hang Out: An Autobiography* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 140; E. Alex Jung, "Real Talk With RuPaul," *Vulture*, March 23, 2016. <http://www.vulture.com/2016/03/rupaul-drag-race-interview.html>.

two's contestants gave live performances of a heavy metal-inspired version of RuPaul's 2009 single "LadyBoy," while season three's competitors recorded the host's 2011 hit "Superstar" in various musical genres, which they lip synced. Then, it evaluates an important turning point in season four, when contestants were required to collaborate with RuPaul in the promotion of his music rather than just mime or adapt the host's or guest judge's earlier recordings. This shift coincided with a gradual yet substantial increase in the cash prize awarded to contestants, from \$20,000 in its first season to \$100,000 by season four. Such budgeting decisions were aided by the decision to place more emphasis on RuPaul's music, which the host licenses to the program at reduced cost, as well as enlist the show's contestants as co-writers.⁵⁷ It considers the season four infomercial challenge for RuPaul's albums *Champion* and *Glamazon*, on which "LadyBoy" and "Superstar" first appeared. In this challenge, contestants demonstrated their skills as spokespeople for RuPaul's music while also developing their abilities to brand themselves as marketable drag queens with distinct commercial personas. These expectations were elaborated upon in the second half of the show's run. During seasons five and six, contestants co-wrote and starred in videos for a ballad patterned after U.S.A. for Africa's 1985 anthem "We Are the World" called "Can I Get an Amen?" and a 90s-style rap song called "Oh No She Better Don't."

Each of these examples also includes analyses of the episodes' "lip sync for your life" segments, which extends the show's thematic interest in pop music. In addition, the musical selections chosen for the lip sync battles and the contestants asked to perform them also illuminated the show's deeply entrenched conflicts around the racial politics of generic affiliations. Four of the six lip sync selections were originally recorded by black female R&B singers and rappers. Three of them also served as guest judges for the episodes in which their

⁵⁷ RuPaul and Michelle Visage, "Beyoncé, Monogamy, and Let the Music Play," *What's the Tee?*, April 22, 2014. <http://www.rupaulpodcast.com/episodes/2014/4/22/episode-2-beyonc-monogamy-let-the-music-play>.

songs appeared. This allowed RuPaul to identify with these musicians as a fan and a fellow recording artist, and also gave contestants opportunities to demonstrate their fandom as industry hopefuls eager to absorb their wisdom. It also represented lip syncing as a filtering mechanism that implicitly burdened African-American competitors. In each episode, one of the bottom-ranking contestants was a black drag queen. With two exceptions, each contestant had to embody the black diva archetype through mimesis in order to meet the judges' and host's professional expectations, which were weightier than those placed upon their white, light-skinned, and mixed race counterparts. But in order to understand the neoliberal politics at the root of *Drag Race's* fraught relationship between gay fandom, pop stardom, and subcultural practice, more attention must first be paid toward RuPaul's recording career, the star's pre-existing relationship with Viacom, and Logo's dependence upon the drag queen's celebrity as a means by which to create a tent-pole program around which to build its programming schedule and brand identity.

RuPaul is Everything

For many people, RuPaul first made his name in the early 1990s as the self-proclaimed "supermodel of the world," a designation that became the title of his first single and debut album. However, RuPaul had been using drag as a platform for pop stardom well before 1992's "Supermodel (You Better Work)" started scaling the charts.⁵⁸ Born in San Diego to southern parents, RuPaul Charles struggled to achieve any kind of closeness with his emotionally distant father. But he did draw strength from his mother, Toni, and singer Diana Ross, who he first saw on television as a child during a performance with her girl group the Supremes on *The Ed*

⁵⁸ Larry Flick, "RuPaul Changing the Makeup of Pop Music," *Billboard* 105, no. 23 (1993): 1, 100-101.

Sullivan Show.⁵⁹ These women became touchstones for Charles, who channeled their strength, glamour, and iconicity as black women into creative inspiration for his drag reinvention.

At 15, Charles relocated to Atlanta with his older sister and her husband to attend school. He applied his love for punk ice queens like Wendy O. Williams of the Plasmatics and Blondie's Debbie Harry by forming new wave bands like Wee-Wee Pole and the U-Hauls. The latter group generated a local following from their appearances on public access programs like *The American Music Show* and *Dance-O-Rama*.⁶⁰ Among RuPaul's early fans were Athens post-punk outfit the B-52s, who infused garage rock with a queer enthusiasm for retro kitsch like B-movies, girl groups, and thrift-store fashions. The band later hired RuPaul as a featured dancer in the video for their 1989 single "Love Shack," their ode to the makeshift hedonism they enjoyed in their youth that their comeback album, *Cosmic Thing*, reflected on following the death of their lead guitarist Ricky Wilson in 1985 due to AIDS-based health complications.⁶¹ By that point, RuPaul was ensconced in drag culture, dropping the surname "Charles" to better emulate the outsize celebrity of pop divas like Diana [Ross], Tina [Turner], and Cher [Sarkisian]. He also relocated from Atlanta to New York City in the mid-1980s and became a fixture in the downtown club scene by performing at hot spots like Danceteria and the Pyramid Club.⁶²

Music was always a major part of RuPaul's act. Alongside "terrorist drag" concept artist Vaginal Crème Davis, RuPaul sang back-up for rock guitarist Glen Meadmore.⁶³ RuPaul also

⁵⁹ Mim Udovich, "RuPaul," *Rolling Stone* 662 (1993): 24; "Diana Ross," *The RuPaul Show*, 1996. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=DY0o8N1xvr0.

⁶⁰ Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, "RuPaul Runs the World," *Spin*, April 1, 2013. <http://www.spin.com/2013/04/rupaul-runs-the-world-drag-race-supermodel/>.

⁶¹ Jennifer O'Neill, "RuPaul: 25 Things You Didn't Know About Me," *Us Weekly* 906 (2012): 14; Michael Azerrad, "The B-52s: Mission Accomplished," *Rolling Stone*, March 22, 1990. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/mission-accomplished-19900322>.

⁶² Jason Wu, "The Transformer: RuPaul," *Interview*, September 3, 2013. <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/rupaul>.

⁶³ Greg Kot, "What a Drag," *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1995. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1995-09-01/entertainment/9509010298_1_new-york-dolls-angela-davis-glam.

developed a partnership with long-time managers Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey, aspiring filmmakers who met the enterprising drag artist while he was wheatpasting fliers proclaiming “RuPaul is Everything” while wearing a jock strap and a fright wig in New York.⁶⁴ The trio enlisted the services of producer Jimmy Harry and began producing original music that they self-distributed by targeting the city’s gay nightclubs. As *Billboard* contributor Larry Flick observed in 1993, RuPaul’s decision to package himself as a singer set him apart from other queens, who frequently defaulted on “the common drag practice of lip-syncing” when they performed at clubs.⁶⁵ It also gave RuPaul professional experience that helped facilitate his eventual transition into a professional recording artist when he signed with Warner-distributed Tommy Boy Records. Label president Monica Lynch claimed that representing RuPaul “was like signing a rock act that has been gigging for a long time.”⁶⁶ But since Tommy Boy struggled to secure support from mainstream retailers, gay club scenes were invaluable to RuPaul’s recording career.

RuPaul, Bailey, and Barbato also capitalized on the star’s moment by turning the singer’s 1993 debut album *Supermodel of the World* into a foundation for a multimedia empire. By October 1996 RuPaul recorded a dance version of Elton John’s 1976 single “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” for his *Duets* album,⁶⁷ appeared in *The Brady Bunch Movie* and *Crooklyn*,⁶⁸ signed a spokesmodel contract with MAC Cosmetics as part of the company’s fundraising initiatives for AIDs research,⁶⁹ penned a memoir for Disney’s Hyperion imprint,⁷⁰ released a second album on

⁶⁴ James Michael Nichols, “After Dark: Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey, AKA the Fabulous Pop Tarts,” *The Huffington Post*, July 27, 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/27/randy-barbato-fenton-bail_n_5621822.html.

⁶⁵ Flick, “Changing the Face of Pop,” 100.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Charles Aaron, “Singles,” *Spin* 10, no. 2 (1994): 102.

⁶⁸ Shepherd, “RuPaul Runs the World.”

⁶⁹ Bridget March, “Viva Glam, MAC AIDS Fund Returns With RuPaul Showcasing 90s Lipstick,” *Cosmopolitan UK*, August 14, 2013. <http://www.cosmopolitan.co.uk/beauty-hair/reviews/a21939/mac-viva-glam-lipsticks-2013-ropaul/>.

⁷⁰ Jacob Anderson-Minshall, “Bush is Out, RuPaul is In,” *Windy City Times*, January 28, 2009, 15.

Warner's specialty label Rhino Records, and premiered *The RuPaul Show* on MTV's sister channel VH1.⁷¹ Though the talk show only lasted two seasons, it aided the development of *RuPaul's Drag Race* in three ways. First, it gave RuPaul hosting experience that was essential for mounting the competition-based reality show and the professional network to staff it with guest judges and mentors from the music industries. Second, it gave him an opportunity to work with longtime friend and co-host Michelle Visage, a former member of short-lived girl group Seduction who had worked for many years as a radio host in New York and Florida.⁷² Finally, it gave Bailey and Barbato the opportunity to develop a partnership with VH1—and by extension, Viacom—by co-producing the show with the cable channel through their fledgling company World of Wonder, an experience that later gave them leverage when they pitched *Drag Race* to Logo.⁷³ However, it took nearly ten years for the trio to successfully pitch another television vehicle for RuPaul. In the mid-2000s they brought in Tom Campbell, MTV's former director of series programming, to help them develop their queer recombinant of *Project Runway*, *America's Next Top Model*, and *American Idol* for drag queens. They took meetings with several television executives, including the programming department at Viacom's LGBT-lifestyle upstart channel. Logo turned down *Drag Race* four times before acquiring it in 2008, primarily because, according to Campbell, it “had not really been enthusiastic about being *that* gay.”⁷⁴

In truth, Logo had struggled with how best to represent the concerns and interests of a queer viewership for commercial gains from its inception, due to both rampant homophobia within the television industry and Logo executives' assimilationist tendencies. Aided by

⁷¹ Andrea Higbie, “New Heights for a Diva: RuPaul's TV Talk Show,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1996. <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/20/style/new-heights-for-a-diva-rupaul-s-tv-talk-show.html>.

⁷² Shepherd, “RuPaul Runs the World.”

⁷³ Natasha Vargas-Cooper, “Freakshow: World of Wonder is Hollywood's Nuttiest Production Company,” *Out*, February 18, 2013. <http://www.out.com/entertainment/movies/2013/02/18/world-wonder-fenton-bailey-randy-barbato?page=0,0>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

eleventh-hour carriage agreements with DirecTV and Charter, Logo entered in 13 million homes in June 2005.⁷⁵ Viacom's new channel was launched in the wake of ventures like Here!, a subscription service that dubbed itself "America's first gay television network" when it went live in 2002,⁷⁶ as well as the independently owned Q Television.⁷⁷ It also debuted amid regulatory shifts like the Communications, Opportunity, Promotion, and Enhancement Act, which allowed telephone companies interested in providing customers with television services to bypass the local franchising agreements cablers previously had to honor, which some critics believed adversely affected independent programmers' ability to develop gay content for public access television during the first half of the decade.⁷⁸ The need for such programming and concern over its palatability was not unsubstantiated either. Pervasive homophobia still governed industry perception about LGBT audiences and programming at the time, which many members of the Logo team experienced first-hand. When MTV's head of affiliate sales presented Logo's concept to one cable operator, he told her flatly that "[t]here are no gays here."⁷⁹ This resulted in Viacom preparing talking points when team members spoke to angry customers or members of the press who objected to the mere idea of creating an entire cable channel devoted to LGBT programming because they assumed its content would be too prurient or controversial simply because it dared to represent the concerns, cultures, and lives of queer communities.

In addition to playing defense, Logo struggled internally to develop its own brand identity. Executives were given the unenviable task of having to appeal to multiple constituents within the "LGBT" acronym, which in turn revealed that even "gay" and "lesbian"—the two

⁷⁵ John Dempsey, "Viacom's Logo Plants Its Flag," *Variety* 287, no. 64 (2005): 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ James Hibberd, "Gay Net to Bump VH1 Spinoff," *Television Week* 24, no. 18 (2005): 1, 34.

⁷⁸ Andy Humm, "The End of 'Gay USA' and All Public Access TV," *Gay City News* 5, no. 18 (May 4-10, 2006): http://gaycitynews.nyc/gcn_518/theendofgayusa.html.

⁷⁹ Adam Sternbergh, "I Want My Gay TV," *New York* 38, no. 23 (2005): 58.

identity groups the channel most ardently courted—could not be treated monolithically. President Brian Graden, formerly MTV’s head of programming and an out gay man, advocated for assimilationism in the channel’s approach to programming gay content by “start[ing] with what our life experience is, and let[ting] the shows suggest themselves from there” while framing it as universal and therefore palatable to straight audiences.⁸⁰ Graden attempted to accomplish this by developing six original series including *Noah’s Arc*, a drama about a black gay male friend group in Los Angeles, *Curl Girls*, a docusoap about lesbian surfers, and *Tickled Pink*, a clip show about gay pop iconography modeled after VH1’s *I Love the 80s* series. Graden then padded the schedule with over 200 film and second-run television acquisitions cobbled together from Viacom’s library and licensing agreements with various studios. Graden also wanted to avoid overrelying on reality programming, a genre that was fast reaching a saturation point on MTV and VH1 and could limit Logo’s ability to differentiate itself as a sister channel. Graden’s reticence toward associating the channel with reality television was shrouded in respectability politics. Graden wanted to avoid offending mainstream sponsors like Miller Lite, which informed his decision not to buy reruns of explicit queer-themed programs like *Queer as Folk* and *The L-Word* and to avoid addressing issues like gay marriage in its original programming.⁸¹ This may have also informed Graden’s aversion to queer-oriented reality programming, and with it the genre’s industrial stigma as a form that exploited, sensationalized, and often engineered subjects’ baser impulses for the camera. Such representations risked playing into the stereotype of queer people as amoral pleasure seekers, a homophobic perception that haunted gay men long after the AIDS epidemic. Thus it is telling that *Drag Race* was only greenlit after *World of Wonder* made the case for drag culture’s appeal to Logo’s viewership by distancing itself from

⁸⁰ Ibid.,” 59.

⁸¹ Dempsey, “Viacom’s Logo Plants Its Flag.”

reality's taste for "booze and pills," as Campbell put it, and framing the show about queens' professionalization as a reflection of RuPaul's entrepreneurship.⁸²

Logo also benefitted from *Drag Race*'s willingness to work with corporate sponsors. In April 2008, *MediaWeek* reported the findings of a Simmons Research study that quantified eight distinct dimensions of audience engagement, with Logo topping all advertiser-supported networks and channels in adults 18-34 and 18-49, as well as placing second among viewers between the ages of 25 and 54.⁸³ Logo's executive vice-president and general manager Lisa Sherman claimed that she was not surprised "that the niche networks rise to the top because they speak to folks who share a very particular affinity," a position echoed by advertising executive Howard Buford, who claimed that "[g]ay men and lesbians report significantly higher intent-to-purchase scores when advertisers specifically portray their lives and sensibilities."⁸⁴ But the channel would eventually benefit from building its schedule around *Drag Race*. Competition programs like *American Idol*, *Top Model*, and *Project Runway* had already demonstrated how network and cable television could integrate sponsorships with Coca-Cola, Cover Girl, and Target through its various contests and winners' packages. In addition, RuPaul was a savvy spokesmodel, which gave Logo access to big-name queer-friendly brands like MAC Cosmetics and Absolut Vodka, mainstream philanthropic efforts like the Human Rights Campaign, and smaller queer-oriented operations like gay cruise company ALandCHUCK.travel. The singer also had many connections within the music industries, which granted Logo access to recording artists and their properties and potentially offset Viacom's loss of VH1 Mega Hits, a satellite

⁸² Vargas-Cooper, "Freakshow."

⁸³ Anthony Crupi, "It Pays to Be Gay," *MediaWeek* 18, no. 17 (2008): 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

music channel that Logo replaced in 2005.⁸⁵ Finally, RuPaul had a recording catalogue to draw from for programming and promotional purposes, and motivation to launch a musical comeback.

The mid-2000s were a fallow period for RuPaul. The singer launched the RuCo imprint with Bailey and Barbato in 2004, which granted the singer autonomy over his output that he did not have with the Warner-owned catalogue material from the 1990s. Yet there was little commercial interest in the singer's recording career. When he released *Red Hot*, the first album since 1997's Christmas compilation *Ho, Ho, Ho* for Rhino and VH1, *Entertainment Weekly* declined to review it. When the magazine requested a snarky quote from the singer for a fashion article instead RuPaul refused, claiming that such editorial decisions were akin to inviting black people to a party "but only if they could serve."⁸⁶ The singer also attributed the hiatus to the "hostile energy" brought about by the second Bush administration's social conservatism and militarized xenophobia, claiming that "gender issues always go underground when there is that hostility in the air."⁸⁷ Taking such claims at face value ignores that RuPaul began his career during the Reagan administration. However, the singer's celebrity status was cemented during Bill Clinton's presidency, a political era defined by a robust economy and aided by supposedly more progressive attitudes toward gender and sexuality often inflected with neoliberal policies around citizenship. In other words, RuPaul's ascent coincided with a political moment that presented itself as socially liberal but relied extensively on policies that only let certain people of color—particularly entrepreneurs focused on individual achievement in the marketplace—through capitalism's filtering process. Thus it makes sense that RuPaul aligned her comeback with the Obama administration by claiming that once the centrist Democrat was elected as the

⁸⁵ Hibberd, "Gay Net to Bump VH1 Spinoff."

⁸⁶ Vargas-Cooper, "Freak Show."

⁸⁷ Wu, "The Transformer."

country's first black president, "it was time for me to go forward with presenting this television show."⁸⁸ At the same time, *Drag Race* existed in a friendlier cultural climate for entrepreneurial queer culture, but also reflected a society that the host believed would never be fully embraced. As he told *Rolling Stone*'s Mac McClelland in a 2013 feature, "[t]his show is gonna go until we get sick of it. Or until the Republicans get back into office."⁸⁹ In the host's mind, an enterprising queen made her own opportunities. *Drag Race* gave RuPaul a platform to promote new music by reframing it as part of his legacy, which he would then bestow upon the contestants as a model for success. "Cover Girl," the lead single to RuPaul's new album *Champion*, would premiere on the singer's MySpace page in January 2009.⁹⁰ The video doubled as a promotional clip for *Drag Race*'s first season, which premiered a month later and featured the song as the theme for the season's runway challenges.⁹¹ RuPaul's music was integral the series. Over the course of its run, it also came to represent an unfair expectation for contestants to reinvent themselves as pop stars.

You Have to Feel It and You Have to Make Us Feel It

Drag Race tethered drag to pop stardom by its second episode, "Girl Groups." As the title suggests, the eight contestants assembled themselves into two vocal quartets. Contestants Ongina and Akashia won the mini-challenge, which allowed them to pick the members of their groups, Serving Fish and 3D. RuPaul then announced that the teams would lip sync "Say My Name" and "Independent Women," two songs from R&B act Destiny's Child in front of former member Michelle Williams and choreographer Frank Gaston Jr., the episode's guest judges. Despite being team captain, Akashia had already been characterized as hostile and unprofessional by the judges and some of the contestants. Such assessments insidiously contrasted her dark skin and

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Mac McClelland, "The King of Queens," *Rolling Stone* 1192 (2013): 79.

⁹⁰ RuPaul, "Cover Girl." *Champion* (Los Angeles, RuCo, 2009).

⁹¹ Tanner Stransky, "The Return of ... RuPaul," *Entertainment Weekly* 1937 (2009): 62-63.

working-class background against “more polished” contestants like Serving Fish’s Ongina and Shannel, Filipino and white denizens of the Los Angeles club scene and Las Vegas’ showgirl circuit. Guest judge and *Project Runway* alum Santino Rice said, “[t]alk about a bad apple spoiling the whole group. You just, like, radiate a bad energy.” He went on to critique Akashia’s revealing gold lamé outfit by claiming “you’re giving me video hoe.”⁹²

Akashia’s interactions with Gaston and Williams were as problematic. Gaston believed Akashia had not earned the right to be difficult after failing to execute the group’s dance routine:

She reminds me of female professional dancers. Okay, they usually act like assholes like that. But a lot of times they can back it up with the movement and they hit it. So that’s why I hire them because a lot of female dancers that are really, really good, they’re full of shit. They act just like this. If you’re gonna be that, you better bring it. Just bring it.

‘Cause if you can bring it, you can be the biggest bitch in the world.⁹³

By making a problematic comparison between Akashia and the female dancers in his employ, Gaston revealed the misogyny at the root of much of his professional advice to the contestants, as well as the belief that talent obviates the need for decorum. Finally, Akashia’s exchange with Williams was particularly heated. Though Williams’s constructively observed that Akashia should have asked Jade for more rehearsal time with the routine, she played into the contestant’s representation as a menacing screen presence. When Akashia attempted to preserve some dignity as a performer, Williams looked off-stage and asked “Do I have security?” Exaggerating her sense of endangerment, Williams concluded: “I’m just telling you what I do and I can tell you that because that’s why I’m here.” She then looked at the camera and exclaimed “Other than that,

⁹² “Girl Group Challenge.” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 1, Episode 2, February 9, 2009.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

mommy, I love you. If I don't make it home tonight..." Williams's simultaneous evocation of her expertise and concern for her safety reinforced Akashia's marginalization.⁹⁴

Yet Williams's antipathy toward Akashia immediately shifted after the contestant gave an impassioned performance of the singer's 2008 hit "We Break the Dawn," a mid-tempo club track sung from the perspective of a woman finding her autonomy on the dance floor. Akashia was aided by competitor Tammy Brown's refusal to mouth the lyrics because she felt the production did not give the cast enough time to learn it. By contrast, the camera's tight focus on Akashia's face during the lip sync suggests that the contestant was not only intimately familiar with the words but also with Williams's distinct phrasing and vocal style, a comparative relationship reinforced by Akashia's and Williams's shared blackness (and less explicitly, their Midwestern origins) and demarcated by Brown's identity as a white Southern queen working within a completely different performance tradition. Akashia's triumph was signaled by the song's opening line: "Something that makes me know everything's gonna be alright/There's somethin' in the way that the stars align/There's not a single moment I'm-a pass by."⁹⁵ On its own, the lyric establishes the song's treatment of dancing as a refuge from an uncertain world. But in the context of *Drag Race*'s professional environment, it complies with pop stardom's investment in the mutually constitutive mythologies of transcendence and destiny that ultimately affirm individual performers' professional struggles, however briefly. Williams's reinforced these beliefs in her complimentary remarks about Akashia's performance. "I was floored. After you got butchered, but I feel like people are the hardest on the ones that we know can really,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Michelle Williams, "We Break the Dawn," *Unexpected* (New York: Sony BMG Entertainment, 2008).

really bring it.”⁹⁶ But Akashia’s victory was short-lived. But the contestant’s struggle illustrates recurring racial conflicts between minority cast members and professional musicians.

At the beginning of “Rocker Chicks,” an episode from *Drag Race*’s second season, the remaining seven contestants were greeted with a cryptic video message from the host.⁹⁷ “You want to be the next drag superstar?” RuPaul implored. “Well first, you better take a little piece of my heart. Then, you better hit me with your best shot. And finally, you need to sing a song just like a white wing dove. So what are you waiting for? It’s time to put another dime in the jukebox, baby.”⁹⁸ Raven, a contestant from southern California who built momentum after a rough start and multiple lip sync battles, recognized the message’s lyrical allusions to Janis Joplin’s “Piece of My Heart,” Pat Benatar’s “Hit Me With Your Best Shot,” Stevie Nicks’s “Edge of Seventeen,” and Joan Jett’s “I Love Rock ‘n’ Roll” and immediately figured out the episode’s main challenge. “Rock ‘n’ roll. They’re all titles of rock ‘n’ roll songs. Maybe we have to make a rock ‘n’ roll costume?” As Raven correctly predicted, RuPaul informed the contestants that they would “transform . . . into hot rocker chicks. You can use your own drag, plus materials provided by [sponsors] Leg Avenue and Michael Levine Fabrics. I expect you to take your charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent⁹⁹ and amp it up to eleven.” The contestants wore their outfits for their live rock performance of RuPaul’s, “LadyBoy,” a drag queen empowerment

⁹⁶ “Girl Group Challenge.”

⁹⁷ Such esoteric citational play is a hallmark of the program’s “You’ve Got She-Mail” segments. It is a riff on *America’s Next Top Model*’s “Tyra Mail” segments where host Tyra Banks drops hints of the episode’s main challenge for contestants to decode. Midway through *Drag Race*’s sixth season, references to “She-Mail” were eliminated because Logo TV’s executives were concerned that such insensitive terminology was offensive to transgender women. It was renamed “She Done Already Done Had Hers’s” for season seven. However, the segments remain intact on streaming services like Logo TV’s Web site. See: Lanford Beard, “‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ to Drop Controversial Segment,” *Entertainment Weekly*, April 14, 2014. <http://www.ew.com/article/2014/04/14/rupauls-drag-race-drop-controversial-shemale-segment>.

⁹⁸ “Rocker Chicks,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 2, Episode 6, March 15, 2010.

⁹⁹ Charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent encompass RuPaul’s criteria for a successful competitor. It also humorously doubles as an acronym for a crude term for female genitalia.

anthem. “To help you prepare for your singing debut,” RuPaul explained with the same enterprising spirit he applied toward plugging the episode’s sponsors, “you’ll be working with one of my favorite rocker chicks whose monster hits include ‘No More Words’ and ‘Take My Breath Away.’ Their latest CD is called *All the Way In*,” which the host held up to the camera before concluding, “I’m talking about the amazing Terri Nunn from [80s rock band] Berlin.”¹⁰⁰

Raven reestablished his established knowledge of rock music by gasping in anticipation and exclaiming that “I can’t believe Terri Nunn is going to be coaching. I can’t believe we’re going to meet Terri Nunn.” Despite Raven’s limitations as a singer, the contestant was confident in his ability to execute the challenge. As he told RuPaul in the workroom, “I think that when it comes to rock ‘n’ roll, it’s about your stage presence. And that’s such a good way to say ‘fuck it’.” Raven brought that attitude to his consultation with Nunn. After identifying himself as a huge fan, Raven prefaced rehearsal by saying, “[n]ow I want to apologize ahead of time because I’m not a singer at all ... That’s why I lip sync.” Nunn articulated the episode’s definition of rock authenticity as synonymous with raw emotionality by explaining that “you don’t have to sing perfectly. You just have to feel it and make us feel it.” The contestant did not disappoint either Nunn or the episode’s other guest judge, punk singer Henry Rollins. Dressed in a sleeveless jean jacket and matching denim mini that barely covered her backside, Raven also wore an asymmetrical two-tone platinum wig that paid tribute to Nunn’s skunk pageboy. His assured performance won over the panel. “I like that kind of confrontation that isn’t necessarily violent but it does make you deal because rock ‘n’ roll is about confrontation,” said Rollins. *Hollywood Reporter* style editor Merle Ginsberg praised Raven’s fluency with rock and noted that “it was extremely nervy [to come out] with Terri Nunn hair in front of Terri Nunn.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ “Rocker Chicks.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Raven did not win this challenge. However, his performance resulted in two subsequent wins in the episodes that immediately followed “Rocker Chicks” and secured his position as the season’s runner-up. One challenge required contestants to market a tell-all memoir while plugging the show’s main sponsor, Absolut Vodka, in a television interview.¹⁰² The other had him make over an elderly gay man.¹⁰³ Thus Raven eventually benefited from his skills with self-branding, product placement, and glamour, commonly lauded attributes seeded by a canny stage performance shaped by his knowledge of rock music as a fan and, implicitly, by his whiteness. The mutually constitutive nature of these attributes is clearer when compared to the black competitors’ struggles to embody the judges’ definition of rock authenticity.

In a talking head segment, pageant queen Sahara Davenport offered a useful definition for rock while poignantly articulating his inability to connect with the genre:

“My confidence has been an issue for a lot of my adult life and I guess it may be I’m afraid of disappointing people . . . Rock ‘n’ roll to me is just about having that sense of abandonment and just going for it. That’s so the opposite end of who I am because I’m afraid to be messy . . . I have been messy and those were very dark times for me.”

As the cast prepared for the episode’s stage show, Davenport intimated a previous addiction to club drugs in order to cope with his mother’s difficulty in accepting her son’s homosexuality as a Christian pastor and credited his drag mother with his recovery and sobriety.

Though Davenport’s heartfelt admission gave voice to many young gay men’s hardships with familial estrangement and substance abuse, it was not enough to elicit the judges’ sympathies.¹⁰⁴ Davenport had also survived two lip sync contests. His intense, physically

¹⁰² “Once Upon a Queen,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 2, Episode 7, March 22, 2010.

¹⁰³ “Golden Gals,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 2, Episode 8, March 29, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Though this is beyond the purview of this chapter, Davenport was in a long-term relationship with season three cast mate Manila Luzon until Davenport died of heart failure in 2012. See: Chris Spargo, “Sahara Davenport’s

exertive performances were well-received, particularly by the musicians who originally recorded the songs. In the wedding-themed episode that preceded “Rocker Chicks,” Davenport danced en pointe to guest judge Martha Wash’s “Carry On,” a song in which RuPaul took solace following his mother’s fatal battle with cancer. Despite those victories, Davenport wrestled with the judges’ request that he relinquish control as a performer, an obstacle exacerbated by his sobriety. In addition, he was not particularly familiar with rock music and identified instead with musical theater and R&B and thus lacked confidence going into the challenge. Another competitor who struggled was Tyra Sanchez, the season’s other African-American contestant. Sanchez also lacked Raven’s fluency with rock music and modelled his drag persona after Beyoncé, a fan identification highlighting the contestant’s age and race. When RuPaul asked if Sanchez was familiar with rock star Tina Turner, the contestant replied that “The only time I saw Tina perform was when she performed with Beyoncé [at the 2008 Grammy Awards].”¹⁰⁵

Nunn similarly appraised Sanchez’s and Davenport’s rehearsal performances, observing that they seemed to be in their own heads and unable to embody the song’s message. However, apart from its winking references to passing,¹⁰⁶ the lyrics to “LadyBoy” utilizes much of the same empowerment rhetoric found in many female pop stars’ discography. The judges identified rock as a lyric-driven genre. But R&B also emphasizes the voice’s expressive capabilities and relies upon musicians’ emotional connection to language. What became clear from the judges’ critiques of Davenport’s and Sanchez’s presentations was that their voices’ interaction with instrumentation, movement, and costuming were perceived as inauthentic to their perceptions of rock. Rollins told Sanchez that “I thought performance was dominated by your clothing. It

Family Releases Official Statement,” *New Now Next*, October 3, 2012. <http://www.newnownext.com/sahara-davenport-death-official-statement/10/2012/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Rocker Chicks.”

¹⁰⁶ RuPaul, “Ladyboy,” *Champion* (Los Angeles: RuCo, 2009).

seemed to keep you from connecting with the music. I don't think you brought the rock to it." Ginsberg wrote it off as "a weak Beyoncé imitation." Nunn, who commented favorably on Davenport's soft voice during their consultation, "felt like she was playing at being a rock star. That she had, you know, read a book about it and so she was trying out the moves."¹⁰⁷ While both performers seemed to have little frame of reference for this challenge—a lack of cultural awareness implicitly tied to their blackness—Sanchez was protected from having to lip sync and would eventually be crowned *Drag Race*'s second winner. Davenport faced off against Jujubee, the season's third finalist, whose underwhelming performance caught the judges by surprise.

During RuPaul's workroom consultation, Raven singled out Jujubee as her stiffest competition. In Jujubee's own words, "This is the perfect challenge for me because I've heard every other bitch in that room sing—ooh, girl—I can hold a note." But after an unfocused rehearsal, Nunn assured Jujubee that "[y]our voice is there" and encouraged her to give herself over to the song's reckless energy to avoid overthinking the performance. On stage, Jujubee forgot the words to the song's chorus and first verse. The contestant also internalized the program's use of licensing as a competitive resource to condition its contestants to treat drag as an opportunity to pay deference to the work of established recording artists by expressing her horror over "screwing up RuPaul's song right in front of her face." Nunn interpreted Jujubee's inability to memorize lyrics as indicative of "a performer who doesn't care." RuPaul enlisted Jujubee to lip sync against Davenport to Canadian rock singer Alannah Myles's 1989 single "Black Velvet," a smoldering tribute to Elvis Presley. Despite Jujubee's floundering with "LadyBoy," the contestant focused on the song's lyrics by eschewing kinetic dancing and moving his body with deliberate sensuality so the judges could better evaluate his ability to

¹⁰⁷ "Rocker Chicks."

mime Myles's dramatic vocal performance. Davenport utilized his ballet training, prompting Raven to grouse that "you see Sahara going into pirouettes and, girl, that's not what this song is." Contestant Pandora Boxx also dismissed Davenport by praising Jujubee "for really capturing the essence of the song." RuPaul sided with Raven and Boxx and cut Davenport.¹⁰⁸ "Black Velvet" also appeared in this episode courtesy of Atlantic Records. The selection resulted from a package deal, a licensing strategy to reduce the cost of individual songs by compensating multiple recording artists signed to the same label with a flat rate for the use of their music. Clearance supervisor Mona Card worked with Megan Goldstein, a licensor at Atlantic's parent company, Warner Music Group, while *World of Wonder* was in production for season two. Of the eleven episodes that required cues for season two's lip sync contests, only three used songs outside of WMG's holdings.¹⁰⁹ By season three, the show's investment in using attribution to indicate ownership intensified, but by applying those practices to RuPaul's larger catalogue instead.

"RuPaul-a-Palooza," the tenth episode of *Drag Race*'s third season, opened with "Rusical Chairs," a riff on the children's game. Individuals eliminated each other by completing the lyrics to songs on RuPaul's 2009 album, *Champion*. Each round was accompanied by screen credits for songs licensed "Courtesy of RuCo Inc.," the host's imprint. RuPaul then implored the queens to "find inspiration from the vast herstory of music to perform in a ladyboy music festival we're calling RuPaul-a-Palooza, sponsored by Absolut Vodka." This was a nod to the program's stage revues, as the opportunity to headline them was a part of the winner's package for the first few seasons. In an effort to strengthen the show's connection to music stardom, promotion, and endorsement work, Absolut's public relations vice-president, Jeffrey Moran, directed the contestants to "let your personality show through. We really want to see that you know who you

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Megan Goldstein, "Personal Interview," July 16, 2014.

are. Show us what it means to be part of this family and part of Absolut.”¹¹⁰ RuPaul then announced that the episode’s main challenge would be to record the singer’s new single “Superstar,” an anthem about the host’s desire for the wealth, beauty, and celebrity in various musical styles. Not coincidentally, *Glamazon*, the album upon which “Superstar” appeared as the lead single, was released alongside Logo TV’s broadcast of the season finale. “Superstar” was also featured prominently throughout season three’s runway challenges and closing credits. Contestants recorded their versions of “Superstar” and mimed then on stage, creating opportunities to advertise producer Lucian Piane’s work on *Glamazon*.

Contestants chose between hip-hop, country, disco, reggae, punk, and pop. They were expected to develop a stage look evocative of their assigned genre. They also performed for the episode’s guest judges, Carmen Electra and R&B singer Jody Watley, who RuPaul introduced as a “Grammy-awarding winning artist” and “my favorite *Soul Train* dancer.” Contestant Shangela Laquifa Wadley was heartened by Watley’s involvement, because “someone on that judges’ panel is gonna finally be looking at performance over look.”¹¹¹ Wadley thought this would give him an advantage over contestants Raja, Carmen Carrera, and Manila Luzon, who the contestant perceived as fashioned-obsessed instead of well-rounded entertainers. As the winner of the mini-challenge, Luzon chose disco and selected the remaining contestants in line order. Though Sofia and Mateo wanted pop and hip-hop for themselves, they were subject to considerable scrutiny by the judges to execute a recording and performance that “best” represented their respective genres. A similar expectation was placed on Wadley, who was assigned a musical style supposedly at odds with his race as a black man despite being a native Texan. Sofia also had to

¹¹⁰ “RuPaul-a-Palooza,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 10, March 21, 2011.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

sing in English, his second language. As a result, they struggled to be taken seriously by the judges, despite their attempts to embody their assigned genres, because of their racial identities.

Sofia was aware of her limitations going into the challenge. “I’m not the best singer,” she explained. “[But] I’m gonna practice: ‘I’m a singer, I’m a singer, I’m a singer’ and I’m going to sell it.” She also knew she needed to prove herself as professional after ending up in the bottom two in the previous episode. Though Piane insulted her singing during their session, responding to a particularly rough take with, “[w]e should figure out the best way to make you sound good,” he acknowledged her effort. The morning after their recording session, six mp3 players appeared in the workroom with their songs on them. Raja offered a backhanded compliment: “Wow Yara, I love it. I can actually understand you!”¹¹² But Sofia smartly cultivated an evocative look, which the judges’ prioritized over contestants’ vocals in their critiques, by wearing a gold sequined two-piece, floor-length coat, and drop earrings. Judge Michelle Visage seized on Sofia’s references to Britney Spears’s 2001 MTV Video Music Awards’ performance of “I’m a Slave 4 U” which featured the pop star writhing with a boa constrictor while wearing a green bikini top.

Sofia also modified the chorus, “Gonna love you as you are, gonna love you, you’re a superstar,” by replacing “gonna love you” with “echa pa’lante” a Spanish slang term for “move forward.” This nod to his ethnicity evolved into a catchphrase that followed him into the top four and in his participation in *Drag Race*’s All-Stars season. Thus, his exploitation of a simple, affirmative Spanish phrase gave him the opportunity to brand himself as “different enough” for the competition, a strategy successfully drawn upon by other Latin pop artists in order to acquire a substantial piece on the international market. However, Sofia was also given the opportunity to utilize “Echa pa’lante” as a result of pop’s use of witty catchphrases to engender mass market

¹¹² Ibid.

appeal. Mateo and Wadley were less fortunate with their hip-hop and country performances, which strained against the judges' essentialist and contradictory definitions of both genres.¹¹³

For her hip-hop performance of “Superstar,” Mateo similarly capitalized upon his Puerto Rican heritage. He added a bridge to showcase her rapping skills. Like Sofia, Mateo modelled his costume after other artists, referencing sexually provocative rapper Lil Kim with a bomber jacket, leather pants, and a mesh top that revealed an ample pair of prosthetic breasts adorned with star-shaped pasties. However, Visage, a white Jewish American woman, questioned whether Mateo's outfit authentically represented hip-hop. Visage drew on her participation in the New York club circuit to justify her authority on the subject. “I’m a hip-hop girl and this is like *Hannah Montana* does hip-hop.”¹¹⁴ Then Visage contradicted her appraisal of Mateo's appearance by stating, “You come out here. You got a hip-hop hat on, you got a girl hip-hop jacket on, and then the rest is stripper. That’s not hip-hop.” Visage also objected to Mateo's “unnatural” breastplate, despite her own cosmetically enhanced bust. Moran worried that Mateo's provocative outfit would reflect poorly on Absolut's brand. Electra challenged Visage's remarks about the contestant's credibility: “what was she supposed to wear? Is she supposed to sport a sag [baggy jeans] and a wife beater [a problematic slang term for a men's undershirt]?”¹¹⁵ Electra's question is compelling in two respects. First, how are creative people supposed to work within such narrow definitions of a musical genre? Second, how can drag queens reconcile hip-hop's normatively masculine self-presentation with the show's prioritization of feminine glamour? But the racial essentialism undergirding Mateo's ability to signify hip-hop to the panel was reinforced by Wadley's struggle to embody country music “correctly.”

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

In the workroom, Wadley told RuPaul that he was debating between wearing a pink plaid shirt tied with a denim skirt and boots or a mini-dress with an asymmetrical neckline accessorized with chandelier earrings and gladiator sandals. RuPaul asked Wadley, “Now you got stuck with country. Would you have chosen it?” He replied, “It’s not about the song. It’s the look. There’s the traditional Jessica Simpson ‘These Boots are Made for Walking’ kinda look and then there’s Carrie Underwood concert.” RuPaul reminded Wadley that people might expect the first look when they see a country performance but recommended that the contestant “go with your heart on this.” Wadley tried to follow the host’s advice. His competitors doubted Wadley’s chose to pursue a more contemporary style, in part because they felt he lacked the skills necessary to execute the look and because they felt the judges had a stricter interpretation of country. His decision was met with considerable resistance. Piante perceived Wadley as being difficult to work with in the studio in a sequence punctuated by instances of Wadley interrupting the producer and modifying the song’s melody. Yet Wadley was trying to apply RuPaul’s advice and envision himself as a successful recording artist with the courage of his convictions and brought the same enthusiasm on stage. However, Visage reframed the comments she gave Mateo and made a vague appeal toward wanting “to see just a little more country stuff in there.” When Wadley asked the judges to keep an open mind in their expectations of the genre, Visage countered with “[w]hen we’re sitting and hearing that song, that’s what dictated it. It’s not our pre-conceived notion of country. It’s that [pantomimes finger-picking a guitar].” In an attempt to excuse the panel’s reductive definition of country, Visage said that “[i]f you have to explain it, it’s not being projected.”¹¹⁶ Mateo and Wadley ended up in the bottom three with Carrera because they could not conform to the judges’ essentialist notions of hip-hop and country as

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

distinct urban- and rural-based forms of cultural expression, genres bound up and continually defined by racial essentialisms impossible for them to transcend in the judges' estimation.

Raja, however, won for his ability to channel punk. Like Raven's comeback performance in season two, much of Raja's success in "RuPaul-a-Palooza" came from his knowledge of the genre. This registered as an "authentic" performance by the judges' estimation. Yet he also benefited from his racial identity, as well as her established talent as a Los Angeles-based designer and professional make-up artist with considerable media industry experience prior to being cast for season three. Raja was widely perceived as a ringer for *Drag Race*'s third season.¹¹⁷ The contestant was already a reality TV veteran as a make-up artist on *America's Next Top Model*, which gave him plenty of opportunities to hone his cosmetology skills, amass invaluable knowledge in fashion design and contemporary popular culture, polish his stage act, and develop a personal network of media industry professionals to advance his career. Raja was able to exploit his familiarity with *Top Model*'s host and executive producer Tyra Banks for a celebrity impersonation contest without the judges accusing him of minstrelsy.¹¹⁸

The post-racial logic of such justifications and their unequal allocation recurred throughout the season. Raja was praised for his runway performances, where he tried on high-fashion representations of Marie Antoinette alongside reductive appropriations of Native American and "tribal" attire.¹¹⁹ Such emphasis on look and the affordances granted to Raja's post-racial exploitation of multi-culturalism benefited his interpretation of punk, which hewed closely to the British iteration of the rock subgenre. Its aesthetic resulted from the embrace of

¹¹⁷ Tanja Laden, "Sutan Amrull: King of the Queens," *L.A. Weekly*, May 19, 2011. <http://www.laweekly.com/la-life/sutan-amrull-king-of-the-queens-2170490>.

¹¹⁸ "The Snatch Game," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 6, February 21, 2011.

¹¹⁹ "QNN News," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 5, February 14, 2011; "Face, Face, Face of Cakes," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 7, February 28, 2011; "Life, Liberty, & the Pursuit of Style," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 3, Episode 9, March 14, 2011.

fetish wear and BDSM, the critical reclamation of symbols like safety pins and the Union Jack to comment on England's rigid class system and economic problems during the 1970s, and the integration of musical genres like reggae as a result of migration patterns between the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, and South and Southeast Asia. A consequence of British punk's appropriative spirit was that it often reduced other cultures—particularly from countries subject to centuries of colonialist rule and frequently regarded as “primitive” by western European overlords—to symbols evacuated of their complex meanings. Raja accessorized a denim vest and short plaid tartan with white Doc Martens, torn leopard print tights, and a purple Mohawk—a studiously assembled outfit indebted to British punk's loaded signification practices.

Raja's punk performance allowed the contestant to demonstrate his knowledge of musical and subcultural iconography. As he explained in an interview that accompanied his performance, “I wanted to embody punk as a philosophy and as a movement and I just wanted to have a great time out there.” Such comments also indicate his professional savvy as a contestant who saw this challenge as an opportunity to integrate his attention toward style with the immediacy of live performance. RuPaul then offered some professional wisdom he did not bestow upon the other contestants in order to assure Raja's ascendance as the season's drag superstar in this episode: “Something that's always helped me is to remember that what other people think of you is none of your business. You know, that's them.” While there may be some merit to RuPaul's advice, it nonetheless absolved the contestant from having to address criticism about self-presentation that was leveled at Mateo and Wadley, who were not given *carte blanche* from the judges to appropriate from other cultures and racial groups. It also gestured toward how the production invested in Raja's career while not affording the same opportunities to the rest of season three's

cast. For example, after Piane observed that Raja's baritone was deeper than the key of the song, the producer transposed the contestant's cover of "Superstar" to accommodate his vocal range.¹²⁰ Such privileges helped Raja win this challenge, resulting in his third victory of the season and his eventual crowning as season three's winner. Moran enthused: "[y]ou really owned the stage on this one. I mean, I was there. I felt like I could have gotten in the mosh pit." Such claims toward Raja's pop authenticity reinforced his market potential as a brand ambassador for a product integral to *Drag Race*'s commercial livelihood. The show reinforced these expectations in subsequent challenges by prioritizing contestants' ability to collaborate on RuPaul's music.

Like A Real Artist

Though RuPaul's music has always been prominently featured on *Drag Race*, it was foregrounded early on as a main challenge in the fourth season. In "Glamazons vs. Champions," the contestants were split up into two teams and asked to be spokespeople for RuPaul's previous two albums. The guest judges for the episode were *Glee* star Amber Riley, as well as "nine-time Grammy Award-winning artist" Natalie Cole. To solidify RuPaul's status as a pop idol, he introduced the contestants to Piyah Martell, a transgender teenage girl born with Caudal Regression Syndrome who became a YouTube star for creating fan videos of RuPaul's songs. Martell demonstrated considerable brand savvy by referring to her fans as "butterflies," a symbol of metamorphosis within the trans community as well as an allusion to pop stars like Katy Perry, who calls her fans "KatyCats."¹²¹ For the episode's mini-challenge, the contestants made butterfly headdresses for Martell in teams. Though contestants Phi Phi O'Hara, Kenya Michaels, and Jiggly Caliente won with a tasteful fascinator, Sharon Needles used the challenge to promote

¹²⁰ "RuPaul-a-Palooza."

¹²¹ Edna Gundersen, "Katy Perry Tells How to 'Tame the Social Media Dragon,'" *USA Today*, October 21, 2013. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2013/10/21/twitter-queen-katy-perry-offers-social-media-tips/3098961/>.

his goth aesthetic and recommended that Martell, “[p]op a little veil on there, and you’re ready for a funeral.” Needles demonstrated a form of self-branding that RuPaul expected from contestants in this challenge, stating that “[y]ou’ll need to sell each song based on a personal memory”¹²² while reconciling their brand with his own. During the shoot, RuPaul directed contestants toward various props, including a pair of high heels the host designed for Iron Fist, a UK-based clothing company and show sponsor. Both infomercials required the teams to plug iTunes and Amazon, which carried the albums.

O’Hara and Michaels were designated *Champion’s* and *Glamazon’s* team captains. The latter contestant’s leadership duties were undermined by fellow competitor Milan, who insisted that they use 80s fashion thematically to assure that they would have a “universal” aesthetic, as well as provide a way to honor the album’s new wave influences. However, Milan’s concerns were indicative of his lack of faith in Michaels and team mate Madame LaQueer, who had limited proficiency in English as Puerto Rican queens. Milan explained that he was assisting Michaels because of the contestant’s “language barrier.” Yet Milan’s meddling backfired on the day of the shoot when his segment was entirely comprised of Whitney Houston song titles, to RuPaul’s displeasure. Michaels was praised for a sexually suggestive, jungle-inspired spot for “Get Your Rebel On,” which allowed the contestant to critique Milan’s by delivering the segment in Spanish. Yet, such critiques were inconsistently applied, as when Visage warned Madame LaQueer that “[i]n the pitch [you’re using] a little bit too much Spanish.”¹²³

Team *Champion* struggled with cultural and linguistic barriers between contestants in ways that threatened to disenfranchise racially and ethnically Othered contestants. Their rivals, Team *Glamazon*, sought to turn such cultural differences into a marketing strategy. O’Hara—a

¹²² “Glamazons vs. Champions,” *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, Season 4, Episode 3, February 13, 2012.

¹²³ “Glamazons vs. Champions.”

showgirl of Filipino descent—delivered a spot for “Don’t Be Jealous Of My Boogie” as a chola—a derogatory stereotype for Mexican women with gang affiliations and a taste for gaudy jewelry and make-up—complete with two-toned hair, candy-red manicure, visible tattoos, headscarf, and a thick Spanglish accent. Jiggly Caliente dressed as a bathhouse geisha and spoke in broken English in the contestant’s segment for “LadyBoy.” Latrice Royale mimicked the exaggerated gravitas of soul divas like Aretha Franklin by selling “Never Go Home Again” as a stately gospel anthem. Challenge and season winner Sharon Needles endorsed “Covergirl,” using ghostly couture and gallows humor to position himself as a contestant that fit RuPaul’s style while branding himself as a drag queen with a marketable goth aesthetic. O’Hara also felt the pressure of the challenge’s accelerated time frame and took his anxiety out on Needles, whose form of drag the contestant did not take seriously. When Needles asked for guidance on his look for the infomercial O’Hara said dismissively, “[j]ust put some white powder on your face and look gothic. That’s all we need you to do.” Needles was hurt: “Phi Phi wants to call me goth and wants to push me into one small box, which is a box she knows nothing about.”¹²⁴

Needles also initially struggled with RuPaul on his vision for the infomercial. When RuPaul asked how Needles planned to sell “Cover Girl,” the contestant explained “I’m going to be pitching it to an alternative audience who might think your music is too dance-y.” After receiving pushback from RuPaul—a response reinforced by aggrieved reaction shots from Needles’s team mates—Needles elaborated, “Well it is very dance-y, but it also you know has other elements to it that I think works for all audiences.”¹²⁵ Needles disidentified with RuPaul’s music by aligning with goth and punk. He wanted to integrate those subcultures’ aesthetics into his segment to challenge the host’s musical sensibility, which Needles dismissed as disco. Such

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

racial tension would also come to bear on Needles after season four, when the performer was criticized for using insensitive language during a stage show.¹²⁶ In an attempt to defend himself, Needles parroted RuPaul's advice to Raja on Facebook: "[a] very famous black man in a blonde wig once said that what other people think of me is none of my business."¹²⁷ Despite Needles's initial dilemma, the queen's infomercial segment was well received. Needles told RuPaul that he used his goth aesthetic "as a way to sell your records." RuPaul complimented Needles's clever segment, which reconciled their sensibilities with the endorsement "though I may dabble in the black arts, when I hear RuPaul's music I see the light." Natalie Cole, who seized on the contestant's risqué stage name as an opportunity to jokingly address her own struggles with substance abuse, also praised Needles for being true to his "original" image. Needles won the challenge and responded to their positive reviews with a show of gratitude, by stating "I'm just such a loser back home [in Pittsburgh]. Or that's how I'm perceived and it's just great to hear you say that."¹²⁸ Needles's savvy positioning allowed him to represent himself as an underdog amid conventionally glamorous contestants like O'Hara, despite having already won a challenge. It also allowed him to assume an outsider sensibility, which was indebted to punk, new wave, and goth, to put forth an illusion of iconoclasm to sell RuPaul's records.

Needles's and O'Hara's fellow *Champion* team mate Dida Ritz left the judges' panel flummoxed by his housewife-themed segment for "Main Event." Given the challenge's emphasis on self-branding, Ritz's pitch seemed to have little to do with the song's triumphant sentiment or

¹²⁶ Dan Avery, "So Is *Drag Race* Star Sharon Needles a Racist or What?," *Queerty*, April 30, 2012. <http://www.queerty.com/so-is-drag-race-star-sharon-needles-a-racist-or-what-20120430>; Brandon Thomas, "Sharon Needles: Making Racist Comments After All?," *Huffington Post*, May 4, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brandon-thomas/sharon-needles-racist-aft_b_1473057.html; Chris Spargo, "Sharon Needles Attacked in Atlanta, Breaks Down," *New Now Next*, June 28, 2012. <http://www.newnownext.com/sharon-needles-attacked-in-atlanta-breaks-down/06/2012/>.

¹²⁷ Avery, "So Is *Drag Race* Star Sharon Needles a Racist or What?"

¹²⁸ "Glamazons vs. Champions."

the contestant's downtown club aesthetic, which was inspired by *Sex and the City*'s sartorially adventurous protagonist, Carrie Bradshaw. Ritz's supposedly lackluster performance was also incongruous with his confidence on stage. According to Riley, "That walk on the runway is saying 'I am here, I am fierce.' But the video, I think Dida thought the costume was going to do the work for her." RuPaul argued that "I don't think she understands that that walk that she displays on the runway can be transferred into every challenge, into her everyday life."¹²⁹

Ritz's triumphant lip sync to Natalie Cole's "This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)," a selection licensed by Capitol Records' parent company Universal Music Group, was the contestant's chance to harness his confidence on the runway within a high-pressure environment. Ritz was embarrassed to lip sync and blamed himself for being in the bottom. Thus he felt obliged to deliver a stellar performance in order to preserve her reputation. "Natalie Cole is sitting right in front of me. I have to do it for her. I don't want her to leave saying 'that drag queen did a horrible job with my song.'" Close-ups heightened Ritz's virtuosic mimesis of the song's dense language and Cole's rhythmic delivery, as well as his connection with Cole and RuPaul through two-shot sequences. Ritz pointed to Cole as he lip synced "This will be an everlasting love" in the first chorus which was paired with a shot of Cole cheering Ritz on.¹³⁰ Ritz gestured to RuPaul while miming "I'm so glad you found me in time" in the second chorus, which the host responded to by smiling and wordlessly observing the contestant's performance.¹³¹ Ritz's execution of the bridge was captured in medium close-up to maximize the impact of Ritz attacking the lyric "So long as I'm living true love I'll be giving/To you I'll be serving cause you're so deserving" while RuPaul and Visage lip synced with him.¹³² Ritz's

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Natalie Cole, "This Will Be (An Everlasting Love)," *Inseparable* (Los Angeles, Capitol: 1975).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

victory let RuPaul quote Cole's lyrics—and thus reassert *Drag Race*'s musical referentiality—by telling Ritz, “[t]hat’s the queen I want to see from now on. From now on, queen.”¹³³

Season four's infomercial challenge required contestants to demonstrate their skills at self-branding through endorsement work. Season five's sixth episode, “Can I Get An Amen?,” expected them to immerse themselves in writing and recording original music for the host's inspirational anthem called “Can I Get An Amen?” It required the cast to collaborate with Piante. During the episode, RuPaul also announced that the single was available on iTunes and a portion of the song's proceeds went to the Homeless Youth Services program at the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center. Therefore, the challenge was a philanthropic effort that simultaneously commodified contestants' work as a commercial product. They would also have to look camera-ready for the recording session, which was the setting for the song's music video. Finally, since the challenge was inspired by U.S.A. for Africa's 1985 hit “We Are the World,” the cast had to channel the 80s-era fashion of participants like guest judges Anita and Ruth Pointer of the Pointer Sisters and LaToya Jackson, the latter making her third appearance on the panel.

Despite placing contestants into smaller groups, “Can I Get An Amen?” defined pop stardom through individual achievement. These expectations were pointedly applied to Detox, Roxxy Andrews, and Alaska, who presented a united front as “Rolaskatox” to the ire of the remaining competitors. As the mini-challenge winner Detox purposefully chose to work with Roxxy and Alaska, and sought to undermine contestant Coco Montrese by pairing the queen with contestant Alyssa Edwards to exploit their rivalry as competitors in 2012's Miss Gay America pageant. However, Alaska, a Pittsburgh-based queen who until this point in the season was identified as the partner of season four winner Sharon Needles, felt pressure to challenge the

¹³³ “Glamazons vs. Champions.”

judges' indifferent attitude toward his performance as a contestant to that point in the season. Alaska demonstrated professional cunning by convincing Detox to assign their group the bridge, as "[i]t's strategically the best thing to do."¹³⁴ This gave them the showiest part of the song, which included a crescendo and ascendant key change. It also allowed them to give Montrese and Edwards the first verse and further erode Montrese's confidence.

The implications of this strategy were not lost on Montrese, who knew they would be responsible for the first take and thus crystallize Piante's impression of the cast. Such expectations wore on Montrese, who had already demonstrated in previous episodes that he was not a singer. Though he amassed years of professional experience as a Janet Jackson impersonator, she relied upon lip syncing in her stage act. The disconnect between image and voice cost Montrese a win in the previous episode's "Snatch Game" challenge, a take on the 70s-era game show *Match Game* that requires contestants to answer questions while impersonating celebrities. He also struggled with the music video's concept and frequently hid his face behind headphones so he would not be seen by the camera. These conspiring factors assured Montrese's spot in the bottom. When Montrese criticized Detox's strategy, RuPaul recommended that he focus on his performance rather than worry about others' actions. Jackson surmised that "I don't think she's focused and that's her problem. Those stronger people are going to take over and win at the end of the day." As a result, Montrese was forced to lip sync to the Pointer Sisters' 1982 hit "I'm So Excited," a song licensed to the production by EMI Music and the Pointer Sisters' estate, in front of Ruth and Anita Pointer. This was a bittersweet moment for Montrese, who made a living from his lip syncing skills yet also had already lip synced in an earlier competition and therefore felt embarrassed to have to do so again in front of the song's recording artists. But

¹³⁴ "Can I Get An Amen?," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 5, Episode 6, March 4, 2013.

like many former contestants of color, Montrese proved her dedication as a performer, ultimately staying in the competition after stating that, “[e]verything that I didn’t give in that video, I have to pull it and give it right now. Because this is my last chance.”¹³⁵

Despite Alaska’s participation in Montrese’s undoing, he had to demonstrate his abilities as a musician. As he geared up for the recording session, she explained that “I’m going Beyoncé on Destiny’s Child. I can’t be Kelly Rowland,” a reference that implied their shared status as supporting players. However, Alaska struggled to write commercially palatable lyrics. Detox and Roxxy also made several mistakes during their session that weakened Alaska’s foothold in the competition. Before recording a take, Piase highlighted Rolasktox’s dramatic conflict for the show’s producers by reminding the trio that “You guys have the bridge, so you know this is the most inspired part of the song.” Detox, a Los Angeles native who appeared in Rihanna’s and Ke\$ha’s music videos and co-founded the vocal group DWV with season four contestant Willam and thus was perceived by the judges as acting as though he was “above” the competition, replied nonchalantly and then swore during a take. Visage seized upon Roxxy and Detox conspiratorial behavior and reminded them that “this is a competition. Cliques can be dangerous.” She hit this point again particularly hard for Alaska’s benefit, stating “Don’t worry about your group, whoever you’re with. No! Worry about you. We want to see what Alaska has. Bring it.”¹³⁶ RuPaul also felt compelled to offer Alaska advice: “There’s a level of vulnerability that you’re not allowing us to see. You are in a relationship with Sharon Needles and she’s got the schtick, but there is a heart there. And I want to get to the heart of Alaska.” The host’s comments exploited Alaska’s personal life in order to encourage the contestant to give the judges (and, implicitly, the show’s producers) greater access to the contestant’s insecurities in order to

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

build a dramatic trajectory that would engender a deeper connection between Alaska, the host, and the show's audience. Though Alaska was placed in the bottom three, the experience recommitted him to the competition, resulting in his first win in the next episode with a challenge where contestants shot commercials for their own signature fragrances.

If Alaska's narrative emphasized how much he needed to prove as a competitor, Jinkx Monsoon struggled to execute the polished runway looks that met Visage's rigid expectations. His aesthetic relied heavily on camp, an ironic appreciation of kitsch and outré cultural artifacts. It was also an approach that RuPaul and the judges met with ambivalence, and alienated more conventionally glamorous contestants like Detox, Roxxy, and Montrese. Detox dismissively placed Monsoon in a group with Jolie and Ivy Winters, who were middling competitors, though he underestimated Winters's and Monsoon's training and experience as professional singers. Winters won the challenge. But the guest judges were equally impressed with Monsoon's voice, with Jackson singling out his contribution of a sustained note during the song's outro. However, Visage was unsatisfied with Monsoon's cosmetics skills and told the contestant, "[y]ou don't need to contour so hard [i.e., apply dark make-up to soften facial features]." Visage's willingness to offer Monsoon advice indicated his "worthiness" to receive it. He was also rewarded for applying the judges' critiques, ultimately winning the season.¹³⁷

Finally, Monsoon's lyrical contributions are worth further scrutiny. In the middle of the song's second verse, Monsoon belts out the line, "Don't let the weight of the world/Flatten your weave/Just tease it out, turn Adam to Eve!" In a challenge that, as Detox explained, required the cast "to record a song about how drag can save people's lives and change the world," Monsoon's message about using individual perseverance to combat homophobia was consistent with how

¹³⁷ "Can I Get An Amen?"

Drag Race harnesses the genres of pop music and reality television in order to exploit the commercial potential of distinctly queer subcultural practices. While “Can I Get An Amen?” and *Drag Race* nod to homelessness in the gay community, such concerns are framed as narratives of personal triumph rather than systemic critique. It is no coincidence, then, that Jolie’s admission that his family abandoned him after he came out during early adolescence and that he found solace through drag gave dramatic weight to an episode that depicted her elimination. Such representations also informed season six’s music video challenge.

For “Oh No She Betta Don’t,” season six’s nine remaining contestants contributed rap verses as featured artists on RuPaul’s new single and 90s-inspired music video of same name. They were mentored by rappers Trina and Eve, who appeared on set during the shoot to offer feedback for each contestant’s performance. The track was produced by DJ ShyBoy, who was called upon as a collaborator after independently releasing a series of mash-ups based on the host’s music called *The RuPaul Mixtape* in 2012. Like season five’s challenge, a portion of the song’s download sales on iTunes went to the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center’s homeless youth services. In this episode, the show’s philanthropic gestures helped frame another political issue within the LGBT community, AIDS awareness and prevention, as represented by contestant Trinity K. Bonet’s HIV-positive status and burgeoning friendship with competitor Bianca Del Rio, who lost a friend to the virus before appearing on the show. However the framing of Bonet’s confession is also notable. As Bonet explained in the workroom, “the first thing was ‘how do we fix it?’ I just knew that there was so much in life that I wanted to achieve and that I wasn’t going to let HIV get in the way.” While Bonet’s outlook is admirable, his comments nonetheless conform to *Drag Race*’s treatment of political concerns as something individuals can overcome through performance and then monetize through commodification.

The main challenge was introduced after the episode's mini-challenge, a recurring segment called "The Library" that required contestants to confront and skillfully "read" one another's flaws for comedic effect. Performative cultural practices like "reading" and "throwing shade" are endemic to drag culture, as demonstrated in documentary films like *Paris is Burning*, which the segment directly cites as an inspiration. It also sophisticatedly tethered drag's complex systems of wordplay and signification with hip-hop's similar use of language and confrontational address, which the contestants needed to bring together for the main challenge. But reading and rhyming are not interchangeable skills. In particular, this challenge emphasized hip-hop's uneasy relationship with whiteness, racial essentialism, and post-racial discourse. The contestants' attempts to define hip-hop through performances of hegemonic blackness and post-racial appropriation echo season two and three's attempts to essentialize specific musical genres.

After winning the mini-challenge, contestant Darienne Lake articulated this point by saying, "I'm a white lady from the suburbs, so when it comes to street cred ... [grimaces]" to justify selecting contestants who were more familiar with the genre to round out his team, the Panty Hos. However, contestants' attempts to define the genre in opposition to whiteness broke down when applied to individual performances. Lake also used whiteness to explain why he did not select his rival, campy Seattle queen and Monsoon protégée Ben DeLaCreme, sneering "[w]hen I think 90s rap girl my first thought isn't to go to DeLa."¹³⁸ Struggles between various articulations of race materialized in other ways. During rehearsal with the Ru-Tang Clan crew, DeLa encouraged Bonet, an African-American queen from Atlanta, to approach the rapping challenge as "a prime opportunity for you to practice your enunciation." The racist implications

¹³⁸ "Oh No She Betta Don't!," *RuPaul's Drag Race*, Season 6, Episode 6, March 31, 2014.

of DeLa's comment offended Bonet, who replied "don't to tell me about enunciating ... This is rap. You ain't supposed to use no syllables, no vowels. It's just all street slang."

Like Coco Montrese in season five's anthem challenge, Bonet struggled with performing live on a music video shoot, though he expressed her defensiveness differently. Rather than dwelling on another contestant's subterfuge, Bonet apologized to Eve and Trina in advance of his first take. The rappers recommended that Bonet give herself enough time to breathe and go over her verse in her head before the cameras rolled, though Eve observed in a talking head segment that "[s]he kind of psyched herself out before she started." During the judges' critique, Bonet told the panel that "this is not something that I'm accustomed to. I lip sync for a living." Thus, while it was implied that Montrese's frustration stemmed from identifying as a Janet Jackson impersonator whose stage act explicitly involved lip syncing, Bonet attempted to articulate frustration for the production choosing to recast as a contestant her primary performance skill as a liability. Bonet withstood criticism from the judges. Visage praised her look as authentic, describing her denim outfit and wedge haircut as "Salt-N-Pepa meets Anita Baker" before adding, "[b]ut you were not on rhythm girl" and criticizing her diction. Santino Rice commented that Bonet "got her ghetto pass revoked for that rap," implying that the contestant was expected to be a capable rapper and a citizen of the ghetto as a black drag queen. But while Bonet was unable to rap, she skillfully mimed Salt-N-Pepa's 1994 hit "Whatta Man." In addition to embodying the trio's dexterous flow, Bonet also competed against Milk, an androgynous white club queen from New York City with little knowledge of hip-hop.¹³⁹

Of all of the members of the Panty Hos team, Trina and Eve were most impressed with Delano, a brash, light-skinned Latino contestant from Southern California who identified

¹³⁹ Ibid.

strongly with hip-hop because of his working-class background. Under his given name, Danny Noriega, Delano also placed as a semi-finalist during *American Idol*'s seventh season. This gave the contestant valuable experience with live singing and video shoots, two aspects of the challenge that stymied other contestants who were less familiar with memorizing a verse and performing it live in front of actual recording artists. Both teams lost momentum during the shoot as members forgot their words or struggled to stay on beat. Delano, however, knew how to perform before the camera, completing entire takes for the editors even if she made mistakes. "You assassinated the rap," Trina enthused. "You were, like, just a real artist." Eve agreed: "Tens all the way: look, attitude, character, personality—everything."¹⁴⁰

Delano's lyrics also demonstrated her ability to fuse hip-hop's braggadocio, virtuosic self-branding, and drag culture to declare his status as a contender for the title of America's next drag superstar: "My name says it all/ain't no need to try to force it/look at my body in this brand-new corset/men turn around, pants comin' down/go home, hoes/where my Drag Race Crown?" Delano ultimately won this challenge. He also worked alongside Panty Hos team mates Lake, Del Rio, and *Australian Idol* finalist Courtney Act who comprised the season's top four, with Del Rio crowned the winner. Though Act's contributions to "Oh No She Betta Don't" were not given extensive coverage during the episode, he furthered his brand as a fishy queen with a verse where he compared himself to supermodel Linda Evangelista. Del Rio seized "Oh No She Betta Don't" as an opportunity to reinforce her persona as a seasoned insult comedian by channeling his skills for punch lines into writing an original verse. He also demonstrated his hip-hop knowledge by sporting an EyeBlack stripe in homage to TLC's Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes and designing an outfit that referenced female rappers' appropriation of men's athletic wear during

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

the 1990s. Such citational play eluded Rice, who compared Del Rio's look to television character Steve Urkel. Reasserting her self-imposed status as an arbiter of hip-hop authenticity, Visage jumped to Del Rio's defense: "I disagree because as b-girls, that was the look that we rocked."¹⁴¹

However, the music video challenge was not the only instance where season six's cast had to prove themselves as recording artists. To promote *Drag Race*'s sixth season, World of Wonder Records released *RuPaul presents The Covergurlz* on iTunes, a compilation of RuPaul songs recorded by the contestants.¹⁴² This simultaneously introduced the new cast and promoted RuPaul's RuCo output, particularly on *Champion* and *Glamazon*. It also emphasized how some of the competitors had already established themselves as professionally experienced singers prior to being cast on *Drag Race*. Such paratextual material informed the show's connection to pop music and reasserted the show's expectations that successful contestants parlay their involvement with *Drag Race* into their own recording careers, which Act and Delano did. By way of conclusion, those endeavors will be investigated more critically.

Bring Back My Girls

Season three's "RuPaul-a-Palooza" anticipated a path certain former contestants would soon follow. After hearing his version of RuPaul's song "Superstar" for the first time, Raja exclaimed "I love it! I love it, I love it. I want to do more!" Raja released her pointedly titled debut single, "Diamond Crowned Queen," on iTunes the same week he was crowned the winner during season three's reunion special. As RuPaul told *New York Times* contributor Cathy Horyn, "Raja is very smart ... She's branded herself. She will sell things. That's what we do here. We sell and endorse products."¹⁴³ Increasingly, those products have been original recordings. In a

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Dan Avery, "All 14 'RuPaul Presents: The CoverGurlz' Music Videos," *New Now Next*, January 24, 2014. <http://www.newnownext.com/all-14-rupaul-presents-the-covergurlz-music-videos-watch/01/2014/>.

¹⁴³ Cathy Horyn, "RuPaul: Still Strutting, on Stage and Off," *New York Times*, August 5, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com>.

column that ranked recent contestants' musical offerings, *Pitchfork* critic Andy Emitt noted that “[t]he manic output of ‘Drag Race’ stars is so strong that pursuing music has become almost a given,” and the surest way to “best expand and carry on RuPaul’s cultural legacy.”¹⁴⁴

At the 2015 MTV Video Music Awards, Miley Cyrus concluded her hosting stint by debuting her new single, “Doooo It,” in front of a chorus line of drag queens, 25 of whom were former *Drag Race* contestants.¹⁴⁵ However, many cast members—and especially recent finalists and winners—did not need a pop singer to give them professional visibility. They had become pop stars of a kind by using the show as a platform upon which to launch their own recording careers through streaming platforms like iTunes and SoundCloud. In 2014, season five winner Jinkx Monsoon released the winking feature-length debut, *Inevitable Album*.¹⁴⁶ A year later, Monsoon’s cast mate Alaska followed suit with *Anus*, which included collaborations from queens Laganja Estranja, Courtney Act, and Willam.¹⁴⁷ That same summer, Act released the debut EP, *Kaleidoscope*.¹⁴⁸ Indicative of contestants’ pop star ambitions, Act enlisted Los Angeles-based production team the Prodigal, as well as musicians Sam Sparro and Jake Shears to help write and produce *Kaleidoscope*. Act also called upon Kylie Minogue’s creative director William Baker to direct the video for the EP’s lead single, “Ecstasy,” and drew upon the glamorous, queer-friendly dance artist for creative inspiration, treasuring her CD copy of

com/2011/08/07/fashion/at-lunch-with-rupaul-main-course.html.

¹⁴⁴ Andy Emitt, “The Best and Worst of RuPaul’s Drag Divas,” *Pitchfork*, June 26, 2015. <http://pitchfork.com/thepitch/815-the-best-and-worst-music-of-rupauls-drag-divas/>.

¹⁴⁵ J.D. Borden, “Miley Cyrus Closed the VMAs with an Epic Drag Show,” *Indie Wire*, August 31, 2015. <http://www.indiewire.com/2015/08/miley-cyrus-closed-the-vm-as-with-an-epic-drag-show-241040/>.

¹⁴⁶ Stacy Lambe, “10 Qs: Jinkx Monsoon Says the End of His Reign is Bittersweet,” *Out*, May 3, 2014. <http://www.out.com/entertainment/popnography/2014/05/06/10-qs-jinkx-monsoon-b-52s-his-new-album-end-his-reign-americas?page=9>.

¹⁴⁷ Natalie Weiner, “‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ Star Alaska Thunderfuck Premieres Debut Album ‘Anus’: Exclusive,” *Billboard*, June 22, 2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6605661/alaska-thunderfuck-debut-album-anus-rupaul-premiere>.

¹⁴⁸ Keith Caulfield, “Courtney Act’s ‘Ecstasy’: Exclusive Single Premiere,” *Billboard*, May 29, 2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6582895/courtney-act-ecstasy-exclusive-premiere>.

Minogue's 1997 album *Impossible Princess* during the writing and recording process.¹⁴⁹ These original recordings gave these contestants material for their stage acts, which have only become more visible for some contestants as they have expanded their professional engagements beyond regional club dates to international industry showcases, often performing under the *Drag Race* banner as part of the program's *Battle of the Seasons* tours with emcee Michelle Visage. In turn, music publications increasingly cover these projects, as *Billboard*'s Keith Caulfield did when he folded in a digest of *Drag Race*-related singles that made the magazine's Dance Club Songs charts in his piece about season six runner-up Adore Delano's first album, *Till Death Do Us Party*, which sold 5,000 copies in its first week and debuted at number three on the Dance/Electronic Albums charts.¹⁵⁰ Contestants also frequently apply what they learned about the music business from RuPaul, Visage, Piase, and the various recording artists who frequent the judges' panel. Such efforts demonstrate the interplay between hero worship and parody that informs their musical output, especially with season four contestants' Sharon Needles's and Willam's work.

Needles's "spooky schtick" became a marketing strategy for her recording career. The title of her 2013 debut album, *PG-13*, nodded to the MPAA's rating for teen-friendly genre movies. The album's principle themes were idol worship, kink, and social ostracism. To bolster Needles's goth image, many of *PG-13*'s songs and accompanying music videos referenced horror and occult practices, including "Call Me on the Ouija Board," a cover of industrial group Ministry's 1984 hit "(Every Day Is) Halloween," and "This Club Is A Haunted House," which also showcased guest vocalist RuPaul.¹⁵¹ It demonstrated Needles's alignment with punk and

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Keith Caulfield, "Adore Delano Sets 'Drag Race' Record," *Billboard*, June 12, 2014. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6121126/adore-delano-rupauls-drag-race-chart-record/>.

¹⁵¹ JR Tungol, "Sharon Needles, America's Reigning Drag Superstar, on Her New Album and Music Video, Lady Gaga, and Being a Role Model," *The Huffington Post*, January 29, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jr-tungol/sharon-needles-new-album-music-video_b_2568780.html.

other rock-oriented subcultures in order to authenticate his brand. Needles also channeled rock vocalists like Blondie's Debbie Harry, Siouxsie Sioux, and Courtney Love. Though Needles self-released *PG-13* and was its principle songwriter, he called upon industry veterans like proto-punk drag performance artist Jayne County, Scissor Sisters' frontwoman Ana Matronic, electronic musician Armen Ra, and producer Tomas Costanzo to execute his vision.

Needles's recording career suggests that drag culture's fan practices are outlets for individual creative expression. During a performance at Austin queer bar Cheer Up Charlie's as part of the 2014 South by Southwest conference and festival, the singer claimed that his *Drag Race* prize money funded *PG-13*'s production and promotional costs.¹⁵² For Needles, this required hiring an all-male backing band to accompany him on tour. It also implied additional costs familiar to most pop stars, like employing filmmakers Santiago Felipe and Michael Sharkey to direct glossy music videos for singles "Ouija Board" and "Haunted House." As Needles told *The Huffington Post*'s JR Tungol, "I put really, really high expectations on myself. On the album, I knew I didn't just want to make a pop record. I wanted elements of punk. I wanted elements of metal. I wanted to work with my idols, and I just didn't want to have a 'tranny track,' as we call them," a loaded term for drag queen novelty songs that receive limited rotation at gay bars.¹⁵³ Needles was not content to lip sync Blondie songs; like RuPaul, he wanted to *become* Debbie Harry. As a result, there was a palpable tension within Needles's professional trajectory. Needles wanted to claim a subcultural position that he perceived as antithetical to many popular queer- and queer-friendly pop stars like Lady Gaga, of whom Needles disparaged for her participation in South by Southwest as a mainstream pop star whose

¹⁵² Sharon Needles, "SXSW Concert Appearance," March 15, 2014.

¹⁵³ Tungol, "Sharon Needles, America's Reigning Drag Superstar, on Her New Album and Music Video, Lady Gaga, and Being a Role Model."

presence at the festival was antithetical to its mission to discover new, frequently unsigned talent. Lady Gaga's showcase was sponsored by Doritos, which many critics believed served as an example of how the music festival sold out its original efforts to spotlight and support independent music for corporate gains.¹⁵⁴ The star also made incendiary remarks against the major label recording system in a conference-sponsored Q&A, which a number of critics and pundits found disingenuous given Lady Gaga's contract with Interscope Records. During Needles' set, the singer criticized Gaga's referring to her fans as her "little monsters," stating "I don't want to own you; I want you to own me."¹⁵⁵ But like Gaga, Needles used SXSW to seek corporate support, professional legitimacy, exposure, and proximity to fans. Thus Needles's professional maneuvers suggest a connection between drag and pop music that reflects the industrial and cultural implications of *Drag Race*'s licensing practices. Such tensions also inform Willam's music, which uses musical parody as a resource for queer critique.

In summer 2012, Willam released the single "Chow Down (at Chick-Fil-A)" as a member of DWV.¹⁵⁶ The vocal group was rounded out by season five contestant Detox and drag queen Vicki Vox, who released the single on their own imprint, Crossdresser Records. The song was a composite parody of Wilson Phillips's triumphant 1990 hit "Hold On" and TLC's 1994 single, "Waterfalls." The queens' wigs and costuming offered these musical allusions a visual counterpart for the video, which went viral that season. The group wore coordinated white and neutral-toned outfits with metallic accents, a popular look in the early 1990s. In addition,

¹⁵⁴ Randall Lane, "SXSW's Death by Doritos—With an Assist from Lady Gaga," *Forbes*, March 6, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/randalllane/2014/03/06/sxsws-death-by-doritos-with-an-assist-from-lady-gaga/>.

¹⁵⁵ Needles, "SXSW Concert Appearance."

¹⁵⁶ DWV broke up in summer 2014, due to internal conflicts within the group. At this time, Willam works as a solo act. See: Matthew Tharrett, "Drag Group DWV Splits Amid Social Media Shade, Toss Each Other Under the Bus," *Queerty*, June 18, 2014. <http://www.queerty.com/drag-group-dwv-splits-amid-social-media-shade-toss-each-other-under-the-bus-20140618>.

Willam's blonde wedge, Vox's bob, and Detox's auburn blowout replicate Chynna Phillips's and Carnie and Wendy Wilson's hairstyles in the original video. At first listen, the song sounds like an endorsement of Chick-Fil-A. However, DWV's numerous references to rancid food and improper digestion, as well as their celebration of the fast food chain as the go-to affordable dining option for drag queens and rent boys served to mock franchise president Dan Cathy's homophobic personal beliefs and the company's WinShape Foundation, which provided financial support to interest groups that endorsed "traditional marriage," like the Pennsylvania Family Institute and Focus on the Family.¹⁵⁷ As Willam told *The Advocate*, "Drag queens are not the target endorsement market for a chicken eatery. It's kind of like a 'Ha ha, you want to come for us? Let me come for you!' from three of the cutest drag queens in the world."¹⁵⁸

The song became indicative of the girl group's style. DWV parodied contemporary pop songs in order to satirize issues like gay sexuality, beauty standards, and celebrity. As Willam explained to *Billboard*'s Keith Caulfield, "I've always wanted to go in a very Lonely Island direction [a reference to comedian Andy Samberg's music project with Jorme Taccone and Akiva Schaeffer, whose videos were featured on *Saturday Night Live* and often humorously referenced 90s R&B and hip-hop], but I was never capable enough of producing that kind of music on my own. I'm always just the drunk one who's re-writing songs in really inappropriate [ways] in my head."¹⁵⁹ DWV first responded to the success of "Chow Down" in January 2013 with "Boy is a Bottom," an ode to gay male anal intercourse that sent up Alicia Keys's gospel-

¹⁵⁷ Brian Solomon, "Chick-Fil-A Even If You're Gay? Three Drag Queens Lampoon Company in Music Video," *Forbes*, March 20, 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/briansolomon/2012/03/20/chick-fil-a-even-if-youre-gay-three-drag-queens-lampoon-company-in-music-video/>.

¹⁵⁸ Jeremy Kinser, "EXCLUSIVE: Willam Belli on Drag Queens Eating at Chick-Fil-A," *The Advocate*, March 20, 2012. <http://www.advocate.com/news/daily-news/2012/03/20/exclusive-william-belli-drag-queens-eating-chickfila>.

¹⁵⁹ Keith Caulfield, "Drag Star Willam Talks Onstage Enemas, Pop Parodies, New Album & More," *Billboard*, June 7, 2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6590536/drag-star-willam-pop-parodies-new-album-book>.

tinged ballad “Girl On Fire” and included a repurposing of the bridge to R&B vocal group En Vogue’s 1992 hit, “Never Gonna Get It (My Loving).” The song’s iTunes release coincided with the fifth season premiere of *Drag Race*, doubling as promotion for Detox.

They followed this up with “Silicone,” a parody of Swedish dance artist Robyn’s sleeper hit, “Dancing on My Own,” that explored drag queens’ dependence on plastic surgery in order to appear more conventionally feminine that drew from Detox’s personal experiences with cosmetic enhancement. Its release also ran alongside *Drag Race*’s fifth season reunion special. Finally, in September 2013, they released “Blurred Bynes,” a spoof of Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” that commented on former child star Amanda Bynes’s increasingly erratic and self-destructive behavior. Such thematic preoccupations allowed the trio of media industry veterans to reflect upon particular concerns within their community, as well as align themselves with female pop stars in a manner indicative of their access as *Drag Race* contestants. For example, Willam recalled fielding requests from Katy Perry during a performance for actor Neil Patrick Harris’ birthday, a point of pride for the contestant “[b]ecause every female artist has gay male dancers and a stylist in their ear, you know? So it’s kind of neat that they know about us.”¹⁶⁰ However, as Caulfield noted in his interview, traditionally cover songs and interpolations require artists to obtain a mechanical license from the song’s copyright holder and a synchronization license from the publisher. Even though Willam claimed that her approach to song parody “has always been it’s easier to say ‘sorry’ than ‘may I,’” she sought representation from lawyer Milton Olin to protect her vision.¹⁶¹ As a result, Willam tried to cleverly maneuver the finer points of copyright law before finally, much like RuPaul and her colleagues, she began writing original material.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

However, when *Gay Times* contributor Harry Clayton-Wright asked season six winner Bianca Del Rio if she would use her win as leverage for a recording career, she was less charitable toward her contemporaries' fixation with pop celebrity: "We have enough horrible queens who sing. We have Britney Spears, who doesn't sing, we have Katy Perry who sucks, why add to it? There's already Rihanna and all those who do horrible albums successfully, why should I contribute to it? I'm going to do the world a favor by not doing it."¹⁶³ Such a stance raises a number of concerns. First, is advocating that queer people eat at establishments run by homophobes effective political action? Willam revealed that DWV wrote "Chow Down" after Detox educated her about the franchise's political stance while she was eating their food, prompting Willam to respond "[t]his is so fucking good, though. Shit!"¹⁶⁴ When asked if members of DWV felt guilty for patronizing Chick-Fil-A, Willam justified their consumption by explaining that they stole condiments and berated the staff, methods they used to acquire menu items wrapped in Chick-Fil-A's packaging for the song's video shoot.¹⁶⁵ However, such actions do not free DWV from capitalism's grasp as recording artists. Second, are there a finite number of topics drag queens can address within the pop idiom and still be marketable? Finally, what does it mean for RuPaul, Needles, and Willam to write and self-release their own material?

Such creative autonomy is rare within popular music, a point *Drag Race* implicitly illustrates by bringing on so many musicians who did not write their original material or own their masters, and thus sacrifice their licensing rights to other parties despite maintaining the illusion of ownership by appearing on the show. In an interview with *Vulture*, RuPaul argued that "[g]ay people will accept a straight pop star over a gay pop star, or they will accept a straight

¹⁶³ Harry Clayton-Wright, "Not Today, Satan!," *Gay Times* 434 (2014): 56.

¹⁶⁴ Kinser, "Willam Belli on Drag Queens Eating at Chick-Fil-A."

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

version of a gay thing” and that contestants’ creative autonomy offers a model for how queer media producers can undo heteronormativity and homophobia in popular culture, which in turn could change how queer communities see themselves through their music consumption.¹⁶⁶ While such a claim does place value on queer subcultural practice, it also lays bare *Drag Race*’s ambivalent relationship to lip syncing, an integral part of the show and of drag culture that the show implicitly devalues by defining it as a filtering mechanism and placing it in unequal standing as contestants creating their own music. It also presents the illusion that all drag queens get to be pop stars, and thus embody all of the hegemonic norms surrounding glamorous femininity that often go into pop celebrity, when they do not get equal access to such celebrity. In other words, if *Drag Race*’s end game is to teach contestants how to commodify themselves, it does not uniformly value their efforts or grant them equal access to the means of production.

These issues matter when helping determine how *Drag Race* and its alum negotiate, embrace, and reclaim corporate-owned properties in order to position themselves as representatives of drag culture and as media professionals to its audience and market. The show relies on music licensing to regulate the placement of discrete musical works, as well as contestants’ performances and professional aspirations. DWV’s “Chow Down,” “Boy is a Bottom,” and “Silicone” demonstrates music’s ability to challenge homophobia, celebrate gay masculine forms of sexual expression, and address cosmetic surgery’s presence in certain drag communities. Yet they ultimately open up narrow possibilities for advocacy and change, in part because contestants’ music tends to focus inward or exploit a market-friendly universality.

These implications are worth considering, because the contestants with established recording careers are well-connected, white, mixed-race, and light-skinned cisbodied queens

¹⁶⁶ E. Alex Jung, “Real Talk With RuPaul.”

who abide by the regulations of feminine glamour and, like RuPaul, tend to focus on such concerns in their music. As a result, *Billboard* has yet to make room on the charts for any of the African-American queens who fought to stay on *Drag Race* one lip sync battle at a time. Furthermore, with the exception of season three cast member's Carmen Carrera's participation in a cover of Labelle's "Lady Marmalade" alongside fellow Heathers Raja, Delta Work, and Manila Luzon, few of *Drag Race*'s transgender contestants credibly pursue a recording career. This tacitly reflects trans contestants' limited visibility on the program. Carrera and season two contestant Sonique transitioned after their seasons aired. Season five's Monica Beverly Hillz came out in the second episode, but was eliminated shortly thereafter in a lip sync battle against Coco Montrese. Furthermore, RuPaul's dismissive attitude toward how difference and inequality structures the professional and personal lives of these queens is discouraging. When asked by E. Alex Jung to comment on drag's relationship to the trans community, RuPaul waved the question away, stating "I don't really want to talk about that because everybody wants to ask about that. It's so topical, but they're complete opposites. We mock identity. They take identity very seriously. So it's the complete opposite ends of the scale. To a layperson, it seems very similar, but it's really not."¹⁶⁷ While the concerns of drag queens and trans women are different, RuPaul's unwillingness to use his celebrity or the show's platform to entertain the prospect of coalition-building is alarming, particularly when contestants increasingly use *Drag Race* as a professional stepping stone *and* use drag as a way to explore their identities as transgender or genderqueer people. Thus the show's engagement with the music industries reinforce neoliberal impulses toward the television and recording industry's exploitation of queer subjects as vehicles for capitalist accumulation that neutralize the potential for diverse representation and systemic

¹⁶⁷ Jung, "Real Talk With RuPaul."

change within queer communities. These issues matter, particularly as the program has continued to the profile of certain parties—especially Logo, the host, and certain contestants—while expanding its brand through *Battle of the Seasons*, the annual Drag Con convention, and RuPaul and Visage’s *What’s the Tee* podcast, which often serves as a promotional space for former cast members, provided that they have something to sell and RuPaul approves of the product.

This chapter argues that *Drag Race* espouses a synchronous relationship between pop music and drag culture through the reuse of the host’s and the guest judges’ recordings for competition purposes. Yet the program’s connections to the music industries and its adherence to the belief that pop stardom is the vehicle for drag artists’ professional ascent reveals a contradiction in the show’s licensing practices. While *Drag Race* relies extensively on recordings from other artists for its eliminatory lip sync challenges, it privileges contestants who are able to use RuPaul’s music as a resource upon which to demonstrate their individual creative skills as singer-songwriters. In other words, while *Drag Race* relies heavily on reused recordings, it elevates contestants who can “transcend” reuse by manipulating the program’s music-based challenges in order to mount their own recording careers by composing and performing original material. Such opportunities are also asynchronously distributed. Over the course of its run, *Drag Race* has disproportionately rewarded white and light-skinned queens who use the program and their winnings to reinvent themselves as pop stars. Conversely black contestants are often required to lip sync as punishment for poor performance on challenges, which recasts drag queens’ skill for artful mimesis of other artists’ vocal renditions as a liability for professional advancement. The program offers its contestants and audience access to a polyphonic mix of recording artists, genres, and performance styles, while limiting those identifications through the restraints of licensing’s capitalist directives and competition-based reality programming’s

entrenched neoliberalism. As a result, the show uses licensed music as a filtering mechanism to essentialize and exclude contestants who could help represent a fuller spectrum of drag culture. Such processes implicate the host, the contestants, the show's staff, its production company and parent cable channel, associated recording industry entities, and the drag culture they attempt to represent. On *Drag Race*, licensing is an industrial and cultural process that unevenly distributes contestants' opportunities for professional advancement and allows music's artistic and commercial directives to resonate, not only as discourse, but also as discord.

*Conclusion***Synchronizing with the Future**

This dissertation mobilized “synchronization” as a descriptor often used within the media industries to describe the processes by which music is combined with visual media in order to enhance narrative storytelling and organize the legal parameters of their union for commercial purposes. It did so in order to argue that musicians’ labor in contemporary television history is at once integral to the development of an increasingly convergent medium and unevenly integrated into its industrial practices and work flows. Such a position supports the belief that consideration for musicians’ contributions to television’s development requires greater critical attention. While scholars like David Shumway rightfully claim that musicians’ work—specifically their performances—have always been mediated by television and film,¹ more attention needs to be paid toward how musicians help shape and redefine the medium of television in particular both behind and in front of the camera. Focusing exclusively on television rather than considering musicians’ work in other visual media allows this project to explore one medium’s industrial history in greater depth. Furthermore, by filtering the trajectory between the multi-channel transition during the 1980s to the post-network era through the lens of musicians’ labor offers media industry scholars a greater understanding of how convergence has impacted the television industry’s processes and relations by attempting to integrate the music industries into the creation of multimedia content and ancillary paratexts, however asynchronously coordinated.

This project also investigated how multiple labor fields seek to demonstrate musicians’ crucial role in shaping television’s convergent practices. It follows from Vicki Mayer’s necessary problematizing of above- and below-the-line media labor by investigating the various

¹ David R. Shumway, *Rock Star: The Making of Musical Icons from Elvis to Springsteen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

jobs associated with the latter category, like reality show casting directors and softcore camera operators, and insisting upon their creative and professional value outside of the industrial binaries that frequently cast their contributions as administrative, technical, skill-based, and subordinate to supposedly talent-oriented professions like screenwriters and filmmakers.² Rather than focus my attention toward one labor field or category responsible for bringing music to television—like supervision, which has already been given considerable scholarly attention in recent years—this project identified multiple professions that musicians occupy in the television industry in order to make the case for the diverse range of responsibilities they are asked to perform. It also identified the role that networking plays in allowing musicians' entry into the television industry based on their personal connections and entrepreneurial acumen. Such networking often results from various television industry professionals enlisting musicians' services as an expression of fandom or employing them on the basis of other professionals' recommendations, which gives indication of this project's debt to Howard Becker's pioneering work on the cooperative networks that organize and shape the art world.³ Investigating the breadth and diversity of musicians' labor roles and responsibilities for television also seeks to problematize some of the peripheral attention musicians can receive within television and media industry studies. This project has accomplished this task by defining and exploring musicians' work of composition, performance, placement, and reuse in response to John Caldwell's and Miranda Banks' useful shaping of scholarly perception within the context of below-the-line media labor toward what it means to be a visual effects supervisor or a costume designer.⁴ By

² Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³ Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴ John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Miranda Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, edited by Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 87-98.

identifying musicians as composers, performers, supervisors, and licensors who work in the television industry and critically investigating their contributions, this project hopes to expand media industry studies' perception of the range of responsibilities musicians specifically enact for television, and advocate for their centrality in the medium's convergent industrial practices.

Caldwell and Banks also identify the implicit gendering that often defines industrial and cultural expectations surrounding visual effects work and costume design.⁵ Similarly, this project inquired about how identity politics shape the integration of musicians' labor in the television industry from the advent of cable to the present. Specifically, it sought to understand the implicit privileging of masculine address in rock fan cultures and its influence on composition practices, the ways in which live musical performance struggles with racial difference in the context of late-night variety programming, the feminizing of supervisory labor and its impact on the placement of female musicians' work in indie rock and electronic music, and the fraught intersectional politics of race and sexuality surrounding the reuse of pop stars' recordings within drag culture. Thus this project also harnessed the analytical potential of the commingling of televisual and musical genre—new wave and children's programming, hip-hop and late-night talk, indie rock and teen melodrama, pop and competition-based reality television—in order to investigate how practices like narrowcasting helped facilitate industrial convergence between television and music, as well as how the value placed on musicians' labor was informed in part by their status as gendered, raced, and sexed subjects. In this project's future iteration, I plan to demonstrate how musicians' labor responsibilities within these distinct fields shaped broadcast, cable, and streaming television over time. For example, I intend to use my analysis of the gender politics of composition work from the first chapter as the foundation upon which to build a

⁵ Ibid.

critique against the profession's implicit hegemonic masculinity over a broader industrial history by placing composers' work on broadcast network television during the multi-channel transition within the larger continuum of the field's development into the post-network era. Thus to that end, I would like to conclude by arguing for greater scholarly attention toward musicians' work in streaming television and offer some potential points of scholarly inquiry on the subject.

Though this is not a dissertation about streaming, each case study in this project has felt the impact of this distribution model shape or extend its industrial reach in some form, and with it music's contingent presence in each case study. In 2016, *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* creator Paul Reubens partnered with Netflix to produce and distribute a new feature film for the character.⁶ The year before, Fox's sister channel FXX built a streaming platform for *The Simpsons* to promote its acquisition of the show's syndication rights as well as maximize the return on their investment.⁷ In 2011, Netflix also signed a two-year licensing agreement with CBS for the streaming rights to *Twin Peaks*.⁸ The business decision generated renewed interest in the program, resulting in Showtime greenlighting a reboot a few years later.⁹ Composers like Mark Mothersbaugh and Angelo Badalamenti were key contributors in the *Pee-Wee* and *Twin Peaks* reboots, while Danny Elfman's theme music for *The Simpsons* continues to accompany the long-running program's opening credits with the help of its composer Alf Clausen. *Late Night* has made some of musical segments available on YouTube as well as Hulu and NBC.com, in limited capacities due to record labels' various licensing restrictions, as the show's host and competitors

⁶ Gilbert Cruz, "Netflix Announces New Pee-wee Herman Movie," *New York Times*, February 24, 2015. <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/netflix-announces-new-pee-wee-herman-movie/>.

⁷ Sean Miller, "Mining Springfield: FXX's 'Simpsons' Deal is a Case Study in New Media Residual Structure," *Back Stage* 54, no. 49 (2014): 7.

⁸ Matt Goldberg, "Netflix and CBS Sign Two-Year Deal for Old Shows including *Star Trek* and *Twin Peaks*," *Collider*, February 22, 2011. <http://collider.com/netflix-cbs-star-trek-twin-peaks/>.

⁹ Michael Ausiello, "*Twin Peaks* Returns! Showtime Orders Limited-Series Continuation of David Lynch-Mark Frost Classic," *TV Line*, October 6, 2014. <http://tvline.com/2014/10/06/twin-peaks-showtime-season-3-air-date-2016/>.

are increasingly expected to create viral moments—often with some musical component—that catch viewers’ interest through circulation on social media.¹⁰ Television’s efforts to accommodate and cater to streaming services have also impacted cable programming. MTV originally released *Awkward* on DVD and attempted to host the episodes on its Web site, though many of those episodes were eventually pulled. While it is unclear whether this had to do with MTV’s inability to maintain the rights to the show’s ubiquitous soundtrack, some of the first two seasons’ music cues were removed from its corresponding DVD box set. In 2013, MTV signed a digital distribution agreement with Amazon Prime, supposedly in response to how its viewership watch television in ways the channel could not support on its own Web platform.¹¹ *Drag Race* has been available through iTunes and Hulu, with the latter arrangement following the program’s licensing deal with Netflix.¹² Episodes are also available for streaming on Logo’s Web site. *Drag Race* producer World of Wonder posted new episodes of *Untucked*, *Drag Race*’s companion series, through its YouTube channel after Logo removed it from its broadcast schedule after the show’s sixth season.¹³ These programs’ contingent digital distribution agreements also increasingly mirror how the recording artists who work on these programs as guest judges and former contestants rely upon platforms like Apple Music, Spotify, SoundCloud, and BandCamp to circulate their music and generate revenue from it. Thus even though this dissertation explored

¹⁰ Daniel Fienberg, “Hosts Jimmy Kimmel, Seth Meyers and More on What It Takes to Win Late Night Now,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 9, 2016. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/fien-print/hosts-jimmy-kimmel-seth-meyers-900344>.

¹¹ Ashley Ratliff, “‘Awkward.’ Set for Release Through DVD-on-Demand,” *Home Media Magazine* 33, no. 45 (2011): 7.

¹² Todd Spangler, “Hulu Gets ‘Inside Amy Schumer,’ Other New Viacom Shows Exclusively in Major New Pact,” October 6, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/hulu-inside-amy-schumer-key-peelee-exclusive-viacom-1201611510/>.

¹³ Adam Asea, “Untucked RuPaul’s Drag Race Premiering Exclusively on YouTube,” *The WoW Report*, February 25, 2015.

synchronization through composing, booking, placing, and reusing music for broadcast and cable television, streaming has informed the programs' uneven distribution for the past several years.

Future projects about musicians' labor on television will need to account for the integration of their work into streaming television programs. For example, Netflix's *Master of None* and Amazon's *Transparent*, included compelling and generically diverse soundtracks to reflect the hybridic subjectivities and intersectional perspectives of their first-generation Indian-American male and upper-middle-class elderly Jewish transgender female protagonists and employed recording artists as composers for their theme and incidental music. In addition, deeper consideration for the labor practices around musicians' contributions toward web series, and perhaps especially toward the efforts of independent productions that exist apart from (and often in opposition to) the conglomerate ownership structures upon which many streaming platforms, including Hulu and Netflix, depend on for funding and content. Scholars like Aymar Jean Christian persuasively espouse the merits of Web television as a tributary for queer- and minority-identified television creators whose work often gets filtered out of broadcast and cable television's programming strategies or denied access altogether.¹⁴ Perhaps we should listen for the potentially diverse labor behind these programs' scores, performances, and soundtracks.

In addition, this dissertation's production timeline coincided with recent interest over "peak TV," a period of rapid industry growth in the television industry.¹⁵ *Vulture* contributors Josef Adalian and Maria Elena Fernandez reported that from 2009 to 2015, scripted programming doubled from 200 to 409 programs. One symptom of this industrial condition is

¹⁴ Aymar Jean Christian, "The Black TV Crisis and the Next Generation," *Flow*, August 2013. <http://www.flowjournal.org/2013/08/the-black-tv-crisis/>.

¹⁵ Megan Garber, David Sims, Lenika Cruz, and Sophie Gilbert, "Have We Reached 'Peak TV'?", *The Atlantic*, August 12, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/have-we-reached-peak-tv/401009/>; Cynthia Littleton, "Peak TV: Surge From Streaming Services, Cable Pushes 2015 Scripted Series Tally to 409." *Variety*, December 16, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/peak-tv-409-original-series-streaming-cable-1201663212/>.

that Netflix will reportedly produce “600 hours of original television and spend \$5 billion on programming, including acquisitions” in 2016.¹⁶ The television industry has not witnessed such expansion since the early 1980s when cable’s ascent required networks to respond and adapt. This dissertation offers a parallel timeline by centralizing musicians’ labor within these industrial and historical contexts. Thus Adalian and Fernandez’s inattention toward musicians’ potential contributions to such growth during this new era of peak TV suggest continued need to explore and interrogate such interoperation between the music and television industries. Scholars will need to account for how such volume will affect “unscripted” variety and reality programming like the shows discussed in chapters two and four. They will have to consider the amount of original music, live performances, and recordings that will undoubtedly be called upon to add dimensionality to these productions, the work force that will be hired on to provide it, and the quantification and qualification of their value. They will also need to acknowledge the rise in multimedia talent agencies and promotions firms who will help facilitate these industrial demands, including Evolution Music Partners, which represents *Transparent*’s supervisor,¹⁷ and Terrorbird Media, which oversaw the placement of the Beach House song from which *Master of None* took its name as a reflection of the star and co-creator’s fandom.¹⁸ It is on these concerns, and the implications they have on genre, value, and identity, that media industries scholars must continue to investigate and challenge as they pursue new questions about musicians’ value as it stretches across other sectors and organizational frameworks and attempts to align and intersect with other industries’ labor processes and products, if at times ahead of or behind the beat.

¹⁶ Josef Adalian and Maria Elena Fernandez, “The Business of Too Much TV,” *Vulture*, May 18, 2015. <http://www.vulture.com/2016/05/peak-tv-business-c-v-r.html>.

¹⁷ “Bruce Gilbert: Music Supervisor,” *Evolution Music Partners*, http://evolutionmusicpartners.com/music_supervisors/bruce_gilbert.

¹⁸ Eric Renner Brown, “Master of None Music Supervisor Explains the Show’s Best Musical Moments,” *Entertainment Weekly*, November 11, 2015. <http://www.ew.com/article/2015/11/11/master-of-none-music-supervisor>.

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