

Alyxandra Vesey

Working for @LateNightJimmy

Abstract

This article analyzes *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon's* musical performances and booking practices to claim it as a site of recording industry and intermediary labor. These traditions exist within the late-night talk format, a holdover from broadcast-era television programming that was indebted to radio's industrial model. *Late Night* represents the format's relationship to music alongside paradigm shifts in recording industry labor practices. It also demonstrates late-night talk and the recording industry's efforts to utilize social media. To better understand the evolution of these intermedial industrial practices and their historical underpinnings, I evaluate the labor relations between musicians, bandleaders, and booking agents. I do this to show how *Late Night* broke emerging recording artists who used edgy aesthetics and networking savvy to negotiate questions of identity and representation. To do so, I engage in textual analysis of the show's musical performances and Twitter presence. I employ this method alongside discourse analysis of press coverage to argue that *Late Night* serves as a productive space for recording artists and intermediaries' negotiation between broadcast network television and social media's labor paradigms. I first analyze Roots' drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's work in shaping the show's musical identity as its bandleader and music director alongside music booker Jonathan Cohen. I then evaluate network-debut performances from Odd Future collective members' Tyler, the Creator and Frank Ocean, the latter following a much-discussed Tumblr post about his affair with another man and his ambiguous queer status.

On November 21, 2011, Representative Michele Bachmann appeared on NBC's *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*. The congresswoman was a Republican candidate during the 2012 presidential election who held controversial positions on same-sex marriage, the Iraq War, and health care reform. Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, *Late Night's* musical director and drummer for its house band, the Roots, seized upon Bachmann's walkover, which refers to guests' stroll from backstage, as their opportunity for protest.

Some house bands perform instrumentals that reference guests' personae and projects. Bandleader Paul Schaffer helped popularize the approach by arranging instrumentals for guests during his tenure on *Late Night* with its first host, David Letterman. As a musician, Thompson took pride in using his encyclopedic knowledge and skill to make "the Fallon walk-ons to be classics of the genre, the talk-show equivalent of video game Easter eggs."¹ When Salma Hayek appeared on the show in 2010, the Roots learned the theme to *Theresa*, a Mexican soap opera the actress appeared in earlier in her career. Such attention indicates Thompson's contributions and his identification with the walkover as "the culmination of everything I've cared about my

whole life: making strange musical connections, reveling in the way that something obscure can illuminate something obvious."²

Thompson's use of the walkover as political critique was not without consequence:

I set out on a mission to find the best song about politics and evasion and untruth. I considered "Lies" [by En Vogue or McFly] but we don't generally sing any lyrics [to avoid paying synchronization fees], so I ended up picking Fishbone's "Lyn' Ass Bitch," a ska number from their 1985 debut [...]. Then, the next day, satisfaction and smugness turned to ego. I was sitting around at home thinking that I had done something historical, something political. I had struck a blow for truth. I wanted credit. When you want credit for something and you don't want to operate via traditional channels, where do you go? In this day and age, you go to Twitter. That's where I went. Someone tweeted me a question: "Was that 'Lyn' Ass Bitch'?" I answered like someone in

the grip of ego, which is exactly what it was: “Sho’ nuf.” [...] We had a meeting in Jimmy’s office, Team Fallon and I, and they told me that things were looking bleak, but that we would try to ride it out. Jimmy made a formal apology to Bachmann on Twitter, which put me squarely in the crosshairs [...] That Tuesday night there was a Republican debate, and Bachmann went out and made a blunder. She was a member of the House Intelligence Committee, and she said that six of Pakistan’s fifteen nuclear sites had come under jihadist attack [...] They claimed that she had disclosed classified information. Her staff had to get busy putting out that fire, fast. Plus, it was the week of Thanksgiving, which disrupted the normal news cycle. We were saved by the skin of our teeth.³

The implicit misogyny of the Roots’ selection notwithstanding, this walkover illustrates late-night talk shows’ mediation of liveness, its coordination between television and recording industry professionals, and its entanglement with political commentary. Thus, this article explores *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* as a site for live musical performance by analyzing these moments within the context of the show’s booking practices. These industrial traditions exist within the late-night talk format, a holdover from broadcast-era television programming decisions that evolved from radio broadcasting and vaudeville theater. Yet at the same time, *Late Night* demonstrates late-night talk’s efforts to contemporize the format through engagements with social media. To better understand the evolution of these industrial practices, I evaluate the relationships between musicians and intermediaries like booking agents. By analyzing *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*’s musical performances and booking practices, I claim the show as a site of negotiated media labor. Using textual and discourse analysis of the program’s performances, social media usage, and trade coverage, I analyze Thompson’s work with music booker Jonathan Cohen and R&B singer Frank Ocean’s network-debut performance to show how the program balanced the booking of emerging musical acts and mediating their “liveness” for

broadcast network television and its various streaming ventures.

Setting the Stage

To better understand *Late Night* as a site for industrial labor, I will situate my analysis within scholarship on live musical performance, intermediaries, and professionals’ engagement with social media. On television, musicians perform in theatrical spaces that resemble concert venues, which are often perceived as more “authentic” musical experiences. Jane Feuer and Nick Couldry observe television’s deeply constructed nature, which John Caldwell describes as television’s “myth of liveness.”⁴ Musical performances offer the promise of liveness to late-night talk in ways that complement segments like the opening monologue, interviews, sketches, and stand-up routines. But musicians’ work is heavily regulated. For example, in an article on CBS and NBC’s collective efforts to target alternative rock through its late-night programs’ booking decisions, journalist Wes Orshoski offers a useful itinerary for the band Clem Snide, who were at the time signed to New York-based independent label spinART and performed on *Late Night with Conan O’Brien* on January 4, 2002. The group completed a line check—a process where individual members of an ensemble perform his or her part of a composition so that sound technicians can confirm that all of the equipment works—as well as a sound check where they ran through the song three times as a group, a listening session of the mix, and a trip to the payroll department. Nearly eight-and-a-half-hours later, the band taped their performance before a studio audience.⁵ Yet such work must seem spontaneous to both the studio and imagined home audiences. Keith Negus notes difficulties in representing live music on television, as producers navigate various editing decisions when framing a song’s formal elements and performance.⁶ As a result, Philip Auslander claims that “the home audience does not see the same performance as the studio audience, but sees a performance that never took place.”⁷

Richard Peterson, Murray Forman, and 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.⁸ Forman observes that its negotiated

representations of liveness resulted from camera operators and editors inventing a visual grammar for performances distinct from radio. Musicians also had to develop telegenic performance styles by unlearning “bad habits” like nervous tics, blank stares, or crude gestures that were unnoticeable to a concert audience but could be detected on camera.”⁹ In addition, Barnett observes that recording industry professionals like talent scouts were crucial in discovering musical talent and acquiring them contracts, as well as concert and radio broadcast appearances. Such reliance upon intermediaries bridging multiple industries informs the significance of booking agents, who help shape late-night talk show’s musicality by serving as a gatekeeper for recording industry professionals, accommodating broadcast network mandates, and attracting potential consumers to 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.”¹⁰ However, the concept has its detractors.¹¹ In her analysis of countercultural figures who worked for record labels’ marketing, publicity, and promotions departments during the 1960s and 1970s, Devon Powers uses “cultural intermediation” to shift “away from classifying kinds of work and toward making sense of the nature of power manifest in the processes of cultural production.”¹² 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.”¹³ They advocate for its usage to describe intermediaries involvement in goods’ marketing, their claims to expertise, and their impact over how others’ legitimize these goods.¹⁴ In addition, Liz Moor applies the concept to her discussion about the ascendance of social marketing in the United Kingdom in order to analyze how material and non-human forms of agency help assign value to goods in a digital age.¹⁵ Maguire and Matthews’ framework, along with Moor’s recognition for the integration of digital tools into entertainment industry professionals’ labor practices, informs this article’s application of intermediaries.

Yet while the television industry still holds

primacy in representing and promoting musical artists, late-night booking practices are still bound up in traditional (and contemporized) placement and sales metrics, like *Billboard*, *College Music Journal*, and other recording industry charts, which include—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 champion¹⁶—would become particularly important to the cultivation of *Late Night*’s booking decisions and musical identity. In the wake of a series of deregulatory practices and policies which culminated in the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Acts, radio’s influence did not necessarily disappear; however, in the two decades since its passage, a number of individual stations folded or were absorbed into national formats, large-scale syndication networks, and satellite programming. During this time, a host of digital resources, including apps, social media sites, and streaming services became available. Variety programs like *Late Night* harnessed their potential in their booking decisions.

As a result, live performance must be understood within industrial shifts in recording and television industry labor. In his overview of musicians’ engagement with digital distribution and social media, Eric 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 rupture with, and build upon, their predecessors.”¹⁷ Artists who break into the industry via social media still rely on label and network support. In addition, television labor increasingly relies on social media to find new talent, as well as promote network programming to its audiences. *Late Night* also relies upon social media sites like Twitter—where many musicians are active—for its booking decisions. P. David Marshall argues that Twitter represents a shift akin to Graeme Turner’s demotic turn, wherein “the media are drawn more and more to the everyday and perhaps the ordinary as a form of extraordinary discourse that is a ritualization of media openness rather than any democratic turn in the media.”¹⁸ However, much of this presentation of the self is at once an effect of labor and a site for

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it. This is a point Anne Helen Petersen claims in a *Flow* column on celebrities' use of Twitter, noting that "while being a celebrity does, indeed, require a tremendous amount of a labor, a significant portion of that labor is what others might term 'leisure'."¹⁹ In her analysis of actress Felicia Day's Twitter presence, Elizabeth Ellcessor argues that celebrities use the platform to cultivate a star text of connection "formed through the creation of social media connections to other people, projects, and audiences" within the context of paradigm shifts around media texts, labor apparatuses, and reception metrics.²⁰ We can also see how such shifts in labor expectations affect recording industry professionals' creative and business decisions specifically. 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 into the music-making process. Social media promises more outlets for musicians to claim artistic control over their work, yet it also requires musicians to integrate digital media into increasingly precarious labor processes.²¹

Such labor expectations affect recording industry professionals' work, particularly for solo artists like Frank Ocean. While acts frequently have touring bands or back-up ensembles to accompany them on tour, for television appearances, and in studio recordings, these musicians are billed and branded as solo performers. Much like film and television celebrities, solo artists are distinctly conducive to integrating social media into their production and distribution practices, because it is easier to identify one person as the author or creator of individual profiles on social media platforms to construct a sense of intimacy or proximity between artist and fan. Such engagement ultimately benefits *Late Night*, which made a concerted effort to integrate social media in various recurring segments and games that could be digested as short videos that could be easily streamed and embedded to extend the life of the show's reception. Aligning artists who are savvy with social media and can court a young demographic prove invaluable to late-night programs on broadcast network television, which keeps seeing its ratings chip away to competing offerings on cable and the Web, as well as various platforms and time-shifting devices. As a result, by the time Fallon's *Late Night* run ended in February

2014, the show averaged 1.8 million viewers a night, saw a 10.4-percent increase in DVR viewership (including its "plus-7" ratings), and attracted two million subscribers to its YouTube channel.²²

However, much of this content's accessibility to audiences is tightly controlled by NBC. This prohibits *Late Night* and its ilk from encouraging free and open circulation between producers and fans. The standard licensing period for a live musical performance on a day-time or late-night program is roughly ninety days.²³ These segments (along with, upon occasion, other musical moments that involve copyrighted music or recordings) are usually hosted through the network's website and frequently cut from individual episodes after they broadcast and appear on digital streaming services, like Hulu. Thus, fans and viewers are often beholden to user uploads of individual recordings from non-comprehensive collections that vary in audio-visual recording quality and are vulnerable to take-down notice from site hosts. To better understand how *Late Night's* recording industry professionals and intermediaries simultaneously negotiate broadcast-era and social media labor expectations, I will now analyze how host Jimmy Fallon, musical director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, and music booker Jonathan Cohen shaped *Late Night's* musical identity.

Freestylin' with the Roots and Jonathan Cohen

Integral to the musical identity of *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* was its house band, the Roots. During the late 1990s, the Philadelphia-based group was associated with "neo-soul," a term coined by music critics to describe a generic hybrid of R&B and rap that eschewed mainstream hip-hop's materialism, misogyny, and homophobia. When Fallon took over *Late Night* in fall 2009, they released eight albums on DGC, MCA, Interscope, and Def Jam over the course of their twenty-year career. Drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson also served as the musical director for Comedy Central's *Chappelle's Show* during its second and abbreviated third seasons. This required him to compose cues and soundalikes for various segments, experiences that ultimately served as training for *Late Night*.²⁴ Thompson also established himself as a fixture on Twitter and Brooklyn's deejay scene in the late 2000s. The band

wanted a respite from recording and touring. In particular, Thompson responded favorably to *Late Night* operating 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, forced into existing forms and packages.”²⁵

The group signed on in early 2009 at Fallon’s request, to some contention. As Thompson told NPR correspondent Eric Deggans, “The 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?’”²⁶ In particular, *Late Night* executive producer Lorne Michaels worried that the group would upstage Fallon.²⁷ Put simply, the Roots were originally perceived as “too black” for the program and a format whose previous bands had members associated with more “respectable” (and appropriated) genres like jazz and rock. Despite the Roots’ critically conscious image, as well as their reputation as accomplished musicians, there was no precedent for an all-black, hip-hop act serving as a house band on a broadcast network talk show. Yet Fallon wanted to use music as a way to differentiate himself from his successor, Conan O’Brien, insisting that “[w]e got to go bigger than Max Weinberg [O’Brien’s band leader].”²⁸ The Roots were hired on a 13-week provisional period. They received notes and proved their mettle by performing a wide range of music with little to no rehearsal. Thompson recalls that “[NBC executives overseeing *Late Night*] were, like, throwing crazy stuff at us . . . That’s how the game ‘Freestylin’ with the Roots’ was invented,” an updated version of a bit Johnny Carson once did with his *Tonight Show* musicians called “Stump the Band.” “Once we did it,” Thompson recalls, the group was told to “[f]orget that 13-week meeting thing.”²⁹

The Roots also sat in on network-debut performances. Some artists felt so welcome that they collaborated as visiting band members. For example, Bon Iver frontman Justin Vernon appeared with the band on January 31, 2013. He performed his single “Woods” with them as well as improvised an intro for guest David Beckham. According to Vernon, “[the Roots] always make you feel special and encourage you to be yourself. That’s pretty hard when you know the machines that are sometimes

behind the music scene these days.” *Late Night*’s music booker Jonathan Cohen claims 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.”³⁰

The show’s booking decisions can be credited to Fallon, Thompson, and Cohen, who claims that “Music is essential to our show—it’s not just four minutes tacked on at the end.”³¹

Cohen’s work on *Late Night* also benefited from his previous career as *Billboard*’s senior editor. Cohen worked at *Billboard* for almost a decade when Nick Stern from promotional firm Vector Management introduced him to *Late Night*’s senior talent executive, Jamie Granet, who hired him two weeks before the show’s first broadcast. Members of the *Late Night* staff met with many people, but Cohen stood out for Fallon because, in the host’s words, “I couldn’t stump the guy.” He was given one directive by Fallon, who claimed that “[o]ur voice is the voice of an iPod, which is: Anything goes.”³²

Illustrating *Late Night*’s reliance on digital media, Cohen monitored artists’ YouTube and Twitter presences. As musical director, Thompson frequently “TiVos all the other talk shows to see who they had on,” which helped determine who to book, giving priority to undiscovered and underexposed talent.³³ In addition, Cohen received “emails from Jimmy in the middle of the night all the time,” whether it was a list of bands, a song he heard on satellite radio, or, in the case of lo-fi electronic outfit Neon Indian, using Shazam in his car. Fallon and Thompson met “fairly regularly” with Cohen, who curated 20-25 YouTube clips per meeting.

According to Jason Lipshutz, *Late Night*’s “bevy of buzzworthy performances has given the show an edge in online traction, with the official ‘Fallon’ website garnering 511,000 unique visitors in November, up 49% from a year earlier and more than other late-night show websites, including Jay Leno and David Letterman.”³⁴ Lipshutz also noted that a three-month sampling of Nielsen TV ratings through December 19, 2011 demonstrated that *Late Night*’s average total viewership “reached 1.79 million, surging 25% from a year earlier, while ABC’s ‘Jimmy Kimmel Live!’ saw total viewership inch up 2.7% to 1.77 million and CBS’ ‘The Late

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Late Show With Craig Ferguson' suffered a 9.2% drop to 2 million." Though all three shows posted viewership declines within the 18–34 demographic, "Fallon retained the largest share of that coveted younger audience," a feat achieved in part by the show's music booking decisions. In summer 2011, pop star 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."³⁵ In addition, Cohen frequently used media industry festivals like South By Southwest and social networking to book indie darlings like Wye Oak, Passion Pit, Best Coast, and Twin Shadow.³⁶ His top priority was cultivating a hip reputation for the show while simultaneously attracting talent to the program who would be accessible to a wide range of NBC's established and potential viewership.³⁷ As Cohen told *Billboard's* Reggie Ugwu, "We want to be in business with the next generation of chart-topping, arena-headlining artists. As awesome as it is to have a major superstar like Bruce Springsteen or Beyoncé, we really love exposing new artists who we're passionate about to a wider audience."³⁸ One such artist was Odd Future associate, Frank Ocean.

"I Could Never Make Him Love Me": Frank Ocean's Debut

In February 2011, Tyler, the Creator and Hodgy Beats of hip-hop group Odd Future performed their song "Sandwiches" on the *Late Night* stage. Music critics were transfixed by the Los Angeles-based group's austere production aesthetic, charismatic MCs, and nihilistic worldview. Its founder, Tyler (born Tyler Okonma), dropped out of UCLA's film program during his first semester to focus on music,³⁹ garnering attention for his 2009 album *Bastard* and his outspoken presence on Twitter.⁴⁰ Many critics debated their deliberately offensive lyrical content, which described surreal, hyperbolic images of sexual violence against women and gay men.⁴¹ Reports circulated about their dangerous live shows, including a minor riot that occurred during one of the group's performances during the 2011 South by Southwest music festival,⁴² as well as instances of members' vandalism and abusive behavior following the incident.⁴³

Fallon wanted Tyler on the show, despite booker Jonathan Cohen and musical director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's concerns about

his controversial image. Thompson told *Billboard's* Nisha Gopalan in 2014, "[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.'" But Odd Future's manager Christian Clancy, favorably compared the experience to his client's treatment on *The Late Show with David Letterman* in April 2013, recalling that "they 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 [by members of the *Late Show* staff] and he stormed out. By comparison, *Late Night's* staff—particularly Fallon's permissive enthusiasm and Thompson and Cohen's pedigree—made Tyler comfortable enough to amend the lyrics "with cheeky affirmations about staying in school and going to church."⁴⁴

After Odd Future's *Late Night* experience, Clancy contacted Cohen to book Odd Future collaborator Frank Ocean (born Christopher Breaux) on the program. Ocean self-released his debut mixtape, *Nostalgia, Ultra*, on February 16, 2011, the same day that Tyler, the Creator and Hodgy Beats appeared on the program.⁴⁵ Ocean's July 9, 2012 *Late Night* appearance was to be his broadcast network debut as well. Ocean's performance of "Bad Religion" began with an announcement from Fallon that *Channel Orange*, the singer's first release on Def Jam Records, would be available that night as an iTunes exclusive a week before its commercial release.

Ocean's *Late Night* appearance was notable for other reasons. "Bad Religion" dramatizes a jilted lover recounting a failed relationship. However, Ocean challenged assumptions about hip-hop and R&B's racialized heteromascularity—many of which influenced his associates' output—by singing about breaking up with another man. The chorus explicates the song's queer address: "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." On July 4, just prior to his performance on *Late Night*, Ocean contextualized "Bad Religion" with a Tumblr entry titled "thank you's," addressing the song's subject as his "first love," who he first met four summers ago:

There was no escaping, no negotiating with the feeling. No choice. It was my

first love . . . I 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. He patted my back. He said kind things. He did his best, but he couldn't admit the same ...⁴⁶

Given the close timing of Ocean's Tumblr missive and his network debut, his *Late Night* performance became his coming out moment. However, the singer was ambivalent about labeling his sexual orientation as a black man working in musical genres with prolonged histories of homophobia. As he 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 . . . So, you know, you worry about people in the business who you’ve heard talk that way. Some of my heroes coming up talk recklessly like that.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, many critics regarded Ocean's Tumblr post and his *Late Night* performance of “Bad Religion” as a transformative moment. Music critic Ann Powers placed Ocean within a larger trajectory of queer African American artists in hip-hop, as well as blues, gospel, jazz, and disco. Noting similarities between Ocean and CNN anchor Anderson Cooper's low-key announcements, Powers also claimed that Ocean “presented sexuality as something that arises within particular circumstances, defined by shifting desire and individual encounters rather than solidifying as an identity. In the age-old debate about whether sexuality emerges as something we are or through something we want or do, Ocean carefully rested on the side of feeling and deed.”⁴⁸ Scholars Alfred Martin and Gerald Butters, Jr. problematized homonormative assumptions that Ocean came out as a gay man, advocating for consideration of his candid lyrics about relationships with women to correct the historical erasure of bisexual and genderqueer masculinities within African American culture and representation. Martin argued that “by not using the word ‘gay,’ he could also be trying to have a nuanced conversation about sexuality as fluid, rather than fixed.”⁴⁹ Journalist dream hampton placed Ocean's declaration within hip-hop's cultural traditions and generational shifts around queer representation, noting how he and Odd Future problematized the hip-hop generation's

contradictory behavior toward queer identity.⁵⁰

This sense of liberation permeated Ocean's *Late Night* performance. Fallon held up a vinyl copy of *Channel Orange*, linking Ocean to its minimalist bright-orange cover. He breathlessly introduced the singer: “Our 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!”

The singer'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 and online. *Late Night*'s studio audience surrounded the stage. As a result, individuals were visible in wide shots during Ocean's performance, creating the impression that he was surrounded by a fervent audience. Musicians' stage placement was also significant. “Bad Religion” includes a string arrangement that heightens the chorus' romantic angst. It was performed by a septet to Ocean's left. The Roots rounded out the song's live instrumentation. Drummer Thompson, percussionist Frank Knuckles, and keyboardists Kamal Gray and James Poyser performed behind Ocean, a gesture that signified artistic collaboration, approval from an established hip-hop act, and—given the song's subject matter and its autobiographical context—emotional support.

Ocean's performance emphasized his singing. Ocean often accompanies himself on keyboard, as he did during his 2013 Grammy performance of *Channel Orange*'s “Forrest Gump.” However, Ocean removed any major barrier for the camera by singing into a hand-held microphone as Gray and



Fig. 1: Frank Ocean (center) performs “Bad Religion” on *Late Night* with Jimmy Fallon, accompanied by members of the Roots and a string ensemble.

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Poyser played. Though Ocean avoided eye contact and performed most of the song with closed eyes or 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 in Ocean’s facial expressions to reflect the song’s emotional nakedness. Such dramatic charge was frequently reinforced by audible breaks in the singer’s voice during the performance, particularly at the beginning of the song when he sings the opening line “Hey taxi driver,” the audience for Ocean’s confession in the song, as well as the chorus’ gender-specific admission of unrequited love.⁵¹

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. The following year, Ocean was nominated for Album of the Year, Best New Artist, and Record of the Year at the 2013 Grammys, with Ocean going home with a win for Best Urban Contemporary Album. While Ocean has been somewhat slow to follow up *Channel Orange*—occasionally guesting on other artists’ tracks and concluding 2014 by uploading demo tracks to potential new music on his SoundCloud page—interest in his music remained. Such talent was also associated with *Late Night*, which claimed him as one of its discoveries.

Taking a Bow

This article explored *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*’s musical performances and booking practices in order to claim that late-night talk show is a site for analyzing the exchange between recording, television, and intermediary industry labor. By way of conclusion, I will briefly discuss the “Classroom

Instruments” segment, which features a musician performing one of his or her singles with the Roots and Jimmy Fallon 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. For example, Carly Rae Jepsen’s June 8, 2012 “Classroom Instruments” performance of her single “Call Me Maybe” 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 entered into the recording industry as a 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 (Lipshutz 2012). But Jepsen’s appearance also served *Late Night*. Following its broadcast 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 2014.⁵²

While *Late Night* (and, by extension, its peers in broadcast late-night programming) cannot rely on devoted inflexible appointment viewership, it can attract a substantial audience for segments that appeal to social media’s inclination for bite-size, spreadable content. To achieve this level of virality, *Late Night* frequently relied upon musical segments, drawing upon short performances and the social media influence of the Roots and its guests from the recording industry. Such segments also have a more stable afterlife. The “Classroom Instruments” transformed original recorded works enough for *Late Night* to archive them on their official YouTube channel, thus encouraging long-term circulation of recording artists’ work.

Implicitly, such segments also reinforced music booker Jonathan Cohen’s efforts in spotting new musical talent and associating such artists with Fallon. They also foregrounded the Roots’ contributions as integral to the musical identity NBC intended to cultivate for itself and Fallon as the host of two of its three cornerstone late-night institutions. In the process, the band’s participation in such recurring musical segments may have also

allowed NBC to construct some semblance of diversity for itself within a format that is almost entirely the province of thirtysomething and middle-aged white men across all the programs offered on broadcast network television, as well as its competitors working in basic and subscription cable. Such segments, along with the show's musical performances from social media-savvy recording

artists, were important in *Late Night* crafting an identity for itself within the late-night firmament. It afforded Fallon and his staff the opportunity to maintain its playful, inclusive image toward the recording industry, while ultimately maintaining control over how it cultivates those relations with its musical guests and the audiences it hopes to attract.

Alyxandra Vesey is a feminist media scholar who uses industry and production studies approaches to explore the relationship(s) between gender, labor, and music. Her dissertation analyzes identity and music-based intermediary practices in post-network television. Her work has appeared in *Antenna*, *Flow*, *In Media Res*, *The Moving Image*, *Cinema Journal*, *Studies in French Cinema*, and *Saturday Night Live* and *American TV*. She is also an editor for *Antenna* and *The Velvet Light Trap*.

Notes

1. Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (New York: Grant Central Publishing, 2013), 259.
2. *Ibid.*, 259-260.
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