
It May Look Like a Living Room...: The Musical Number and the Sitcom

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1. They are images firmly established in the common television consciousness of most Americans: Lucy and Ethel stuffing chocolates in their mouths and clothing as they fall hopelessly behind at a confectionary conveyor belt, a sunburned Lucy trying to model a tweed suit, Lucy getting soused on Vitameatavegemin on live television—classic slapstick moments. But what was *I Love Lucy* about? It was about Lucy trying to “get in the show,” meaning her husband’s nightclub act in the first instance, and, in a pinch, anything else even remotely resembling show business. In *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, Rob Petrie is also in show business, and though his wife, Laura, shows no real desire to “get in the show,” Mary Tyler Moore is given ample opportunity to display her not-insignificant talent for singing and dancing—as are the other cast members—usually in the Petries’ living room. The idealized family home is transformed into, or rather revealed to be, a space of display and performance.
2. These shows, two of the most enduring situation comedies (“sitcoms”) in American television history, feature musical numbers in many episodes. The musical number in television situation comedy is a perhaps surprisingly prevalent phenomenon. In her introduction to genre studies, Jane Feuer uses the example of Indians in Westerns as the sort of surface element that might belong to a genre, even though not every example of the genre might exhibit that element: not every Western has Indians, but Indians are still paradigmatic of the genre (Feuer, “Genre Study” 139). Musical numbers might be considered the “Indians” of sitcoms. Like Indians in Westerns, musical numbers in sitcoms may represent something other than their face value, and attitudes toward them also change over time.¹
3. *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961–1966) present musical numbers in quite different ways, and although their “situations” were more amenable to the insertion of musical performance than other sitcoms, the musical number was and still is a common feature of the sitcom genre. How does this fit in with theories of the sitcom, not to mention theories of the musical? What challenge does it pose to genre studies when the primary marker of one genre persistently shows up as a feature of another? How does the musical number function within the contemporary culture, and what are the ramifications of “classicism,” memory, and perpetual reruns? How has the musical number persisted in the genre?
4. The first part of this article will concentrate on *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, looking in depth at the musical number’s function both within the show itself and in the larger context of entertainment and society. For all their differences, these two sitcoms still, in many respects, set benchmarks for the genre today—in a 2002 TV Guide “Top 50,” for instance, they were listed as the #2 and #13 all-time best shows,

respectively—and as such demand close attention as “foundational texts.”² The second part of the article will examine the shifting status and significance of musical numbers in sitcoms through the fifty years since *I Love Lucy*.

Part 1: *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*

Genres: Sitcoms and Musicals

5. In one of the first academic studies of television, Raymond Williams described the sitcom as an “effectively new form” (76–77).³ In practically all the literature on television, the sitcom is discussed as a genre, and so representative of television that in at least one introductory text, the chapter on genre study takes the sitcom as its example (see Feuer, “Genre Study”). The musical occupies a similar position in film studies. Like the sitcom, it is a fairly easy genre to spot—are people singing and dancing? it must be a musical—and it is one of the most thoroughly discussed genres of film as a genre (see, for instance, Altman, *Genre: The Musical and The American Film Musical*). There is also discursive affinity between the two genres in that although they are defined by what might be termed surface details (comedic situations/jokes, musical numbers), these defining elements tend to be submerged in the literature—a recognized shortcoming of genre studies, but one rarely redressed. Because the discussions have taken place above the level of the actual comic set-up or musical number, the crossover between the two genres has flown beneath scholarly radar; it has also fallen into a disciplinary divide.
6. Though film and television studies are frequently regarded as “interdisciplinary” in nature, the disciplinary borders crossed tend to be within the larger fields of the humanities (languages, art, history, sometimes but rarely music) and the social sciences respectively. Although they find a common ground in semiotics and cultural studies, a relatively sharp and occasionally hostile division exists between the two camps. Witness the tone of Mick Eaton’s statement: “While much of film studies has allowed itself to be involved with film history ... , work on television’s past should be conducted in relation to the defined ideological demands of the present” (“Television” 27). This begs the question of how one decides what is relevant to the present if one is not informed about the history (history is always written in relation to the present); while academia may have segregated the media to one degree or another, practical—creative personnel, techniques—and aesthetic crossovers clearly do occur.
7. Muriel Cantor describes the sitcom as a “world of isolated households” (215), and to some extent, the study of sitcoms seems to be a world of an isolated genre. Williams cites the antecedent of the sitcom as the variety sketch, undoubtedly its most immediate precedent. *The Honeymooners* (1955–56, and #3 in the *TV Guide* Top 50) originated as a skit series in the variety show *Cavalcade of Stars* (1950), and even as late as 1983, the “Family” skits from *The Carol Burnett Show* spun off into a sitcom, *Mama’s Family*. Sid Caesar’s variety shows in the early 1950s also featured recurring skits about young married couples in New York grouped together as “The Commuters”—two of the actors, Carl Reiner and Howard Morris, would play significant behind-the-scenes roles in *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. While the skits were separate from the musical numbers on variety

shows, the interspersing of comedy with music and other kinds of performance (and commercials) established a rhythm that resonates with musical comedy films—as well as the common antecedent of both musical comedy and variety shows, the vaudeville ticket.

8. Not much attention is really paid to the continuity of the sitcom with other forms of entertainment, although Eaton, in “Television Situation Comedy,” briefly delves a little further than Williams, drawing on the radio comedy—a clear precedent for *I Love Lucy* via Lucille Ball’s stint on *My Favorite Husband*⁴—and comedic films. Feuer cites the sitcom as the “simplest and least cinematic” genre on television (“Narrative” 107), while on the merits of its “excess” of design and music and the reliance upon a heightened suspension of disbelief (beyond that demanded by most other narrative genres), the musical might be deemed the most cinematic. In terms of the logic of genre, the sitcom and the musical might seem poles apart, except for two historical contingencies—the television sitcom arose as the Hollywood musical was reaching its peak of popularity and aesthetic achievement in the late 1940s and early 1950s; and there was a not-insignificant crossover of creative personnel.⁵
9. Feuer makes a distinction between genre in film and genre in television. Film genres develop by recombining and commenting on earlier films within the same genre; Feuer proposes that television genres have a greater tendency to recombine across genres. She gives the example of *Hill Street Blues*, which blends elements of crime show, soap opera, and documentary (“Genre Study” 158). All her examples of genre crossings (in fact, the vast majority of the sitcoms she discusses in all her work) are from the late 1960s and 1970s. This historical circumscription misses an element of earlier sitcoms that had largely disappeared by the middle of the 1960s—particularly in the so-called “quality television” sitcoms on which Feuer concentrates—and did not re-emerge until the 1980s, namely the musical number. True, the musical number is a rarer “Indian” than most, but the musical was also the one really popular film genre that failed to make the transition to television, largely because of its technical, *cinematic* demands. Music on television was, and continues to be, primarily visual radio (in the form of variety shows, chart shows, and music video) except in its sitcom setting. This genre crossing, therefore, also crosses media and falls in that disciplinary divide.
10. Genre study’s main focus tends to be on narrative. The sitcom is considered conservative in its narrative strategies because the formula of the series—as opposed to a serial, which has a narrative trajectory that changes from episode to episode—relies heavily on repetition. Eaton states that “nothing that has happened in the narrative of the previous week must destroy or even complicate the way the situation is grounded,” and hypothesizes an inside/outside dichotomy to the situation. Any foreign character or plot line must be expelled by the end of the episode:

In its least complicated manifestations, events from the outside can be allowed to enter the situation to provide for a weekly narrative development, but these events/characters have to be dealt with in such a way that the parameters of the situation are ultimately unaffected by either their entry or expulsion so that the situation can be maintained and taken up again the following week. (Eaton, “Television” 33)

“Forgetting” is an intrinsic part of playing the narrative’s episodic game. The animated series *South Park* carries this to its parodic extreme: every week, the snow-suit clad Kenny meets a different violent end (“Oh, my God! They’ve killed Kenny!” is the catchphrase of the series), but he always manages to be waiting for the school bus with the others at the beginning of the next episode.

11. The sitcom is also widely considered conservative politically and socially (see Eaton and Cantor for instance). Due to the pressure of delivering to large audiences of the right demographic profile, sitcoms display mainstream, middle-class values, particularly as they impinge on structures of the family and the concomitant gender and sex roles.⁶ Historically, political and social concerns have tended to be ignored or addressed obliquely. For instance, the anxiety of white, middle-class men over the growing women’s movement in the 1960s explains the presence of not just one, but two, magical women who are constantly forbidden to use their extraordinary powers by their male partners (*Bewitched, I Dream of Jeannie*); and as Cantor points out, the liberal parents and Reaganite son of *Family Ties* often talked about politics, but they rarely did anything about it (215).
12. The family provides the primary “situation” of the situation comedy. Though more recent sitcom families might be of less conventional construction than the traditional nuclear family (*My Two Dads, Kate & Allie, Perfect Strangers, Frasier, Will & Grace*), or composed of a group of friends (*Cheers, Friends, Seinfeld, The Drew Carey Show*), or co-workers (*M*A*S*H, Murphy Brown*), or even a group of co-workers masquerading as an unconventional family (*Third Rock from the Sun*), the group dynamic reproduces that of the family.⁷
13. The cyclical repetition of narrative and the stable family construct at its center place the sitcom at odds with the musical. While the musical often represents equally conservative social and political values, it is narratively progressive in that it proceeds toward a goal—in most cases, two goals, pursued by two parallel narrative drives: the formation of the romantic couple and putting on the show, celebrated together at the end (see Altman *American Film Musical*). If the two genres are to be merged, therefore, there must be some negotiation of the narrative strategies.
14. The formation of the romantic couple is not an issue in either *I Love Lucy* or *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, as the family unit is already stable and ongoing—the Ricardos have been married twelve years by the time Little Ricky is born, the Petries have a child from the outset. Critics often cite *The Dick Van Dyke Show* as the prototype of the sitcom revolving around two axes: the family and the workplace (for instance, Eaton, “Television” 37). These axes might be termed locations rather than situations, because Buddy and Sally are as much eccentric uncle and maiden aunt in the family as they are colleagues in the workplace. The dynamic of the various characters of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* is that of an extended family, whether they are at work or at the Petrie home; the business of “work” is often brought into the Petrie living room, with Laura directly or indirectly participating in the putting on of the show, blurring the distinction between the two situations (making it one, bigger “situation”) and merely deploying it in two different

spaces (“locations”). However, *I Love Lucy* has a similar, if less balanced, polarity between the Ricardos’ apartment and Ricky’s nightclub—the club is seen less often than the writers’ room at *The Alan Brady Show*, but this has the effect of making the club a more enticing goal, a glamorous grotto far more appealing than a dingy office, even one that is often the scene of inspired performance.

The Musical Number’s Place in the Musical

15. Ticking along behind the foreground story in both series is the activity of show business, of literally putting on a show. In both *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, the narrative negotiation between the sitcom and the musical is accomplished through the type of show mounted. In the first instance, a nightclub act which goes on nightly but changes periodically, and in the second, a weekly television variety show in which the details change (a different song, a different performer, a different novelty act, a different skit), but the overall shape of the show is the same—though popular acts or skit characters could be repeated. Despite the necessary variation to provide stimulation and entertainment, at the generic level the shows themselves are like sitcoms, repetitive and cyclical.
16. In order for the narrative to return to its initial situation, the musical number in a sitcom cannot offer the same effect of “progress” (toward the building of the show, toward the formation of the couple relationship) that it does in a musical film. *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* found different solutions to the problem.
17. In *I Love Lucy*, Lucy could never actually be good enough to be in the show, or if she did manage to wangle her way on stage, her performance could not be successful—at least in the way she intended it—because that would defuse the basic premise of the sitcom. If she were good, then it would make it very difficult to explain why she was not then in the show on a regular basis. Of course, this would disrupt the patriarchal family construct of the sitcom, removing the woman from her position of housewife.⁸ In fact, Alexander Doty notes that some of the early performance moments were not unsuccessful, strengthening the need for Lucy’s increasing domesticization—to make it even more impossible for her to move outside the home. This domestic drive places *I Love Lucy* in opposition to the narrative structure of the musical, which usually implies that the woman’s career will continue after the assumed marriage.⁹ The musical number is a goal towards which Lucy aspires, and the gap between her ability and her desire is the direct and indirect basis for much of the comedy.
18. Although the musical number is less central to the narrative drive, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* contains a greater variety of musical performances, most of which emerge from the narrative as if in a classical Hollywood musical, with its paradoxical celebration of entertainment as “work” that is easily accomplished by the talented—at a distance. *The Dick Van Dyke Show* accomplishes this distancing in two ways. The first is the deferment of professionalism by emphasizing preparation and amateur participation: the variety show on which Rob Petrie works, *The Alan Brady Show*, is seen even less than the club is seen on *I Love Lucy*. With the exception of an obviously aberrant Christmas special (“The

Alan Brady Show Presents”), the main characters never appear on the show, nor do we ever see Alan Brady perform. (Even in the Christmas special, his participation is limited to that of master of ceremonies). Musical numbers are framed as rehearsals, the working out of sketches, or performances wholly unrelated to the television show, such as charity gigs, parties, or amateur dramatics—the only situation in which professionalism is reasserted, in the face of monumental incompetence. The Petries are shown to be far and away the best performers in the local PTA, though one episode does center on Laura’s surprise and jealousy at the arrival of an equally lovely and talented performer (“Too Many Stars”).

19. The second method of distancing the musical number was in the show’s innovative structure, incorporating flashbacks that detailed the Petries’ rocky courtship. This technique reasserts the musical’s dual narrative strategy of show- and couple-formation.
20. The leading couples are not the only musical characters: both programs often showcased the performances of guest stars, appearing either as themselves or thinly veiled fictionalizations of themselves (for instance, singer Vic Damone appears as Rick Vallone in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* episode “Like a Sister”). The second leads in both series also have show-business pedigrees: Fred and Ethel Mertz occasionally trot out the old vaudeville act in *I Love Lucy*; Buddy Sorrel and Sally Rogers were also vaudevillians, as well as radio writers and performers.
21. All the characters in *The Dick Van Dyke Show* are content in their current domestic and professional roles, though all of them (with the exception of the most successful one, Rob Petrie) are given opportunities for a “what-if” exploration of other possibilities that nonetheless reinscribe their positions in the show’s overriding narrative. In “The Secret Life of Buddy and Sally,” Rob and Laura become suspicious of Buddy and Sally’s behavior; they think they are having an affair. In fact the two are performing weekends at a small Borscht-belt nightclub. They do not aspire to anything more than the modest success they enjoy in the club; in fact, they have kept their performing a secret because they fear their showbiz friends will misunderstand and pity them, thinking them unable to progress beyond the decidedly old-fashioned (even deliberately corny) vaudeville act. Their idea of success is “domesticated” to contentment.
22. Similarly, in an early episode “To Tell or Not to Tell,” Laura is given the opportunity to fill in for an injured dancer on *The Alan Brady Show* and throws herself into it with great enthusiasm. However, we only “see” the results through the eyes of Rob and Richie, watching on television while we watch the back of the set—another deferment. Producer Mel Cooley tells Rob that they want to offer Laura a permanent job, unless Rob objects: a patriarchal moment if there ever was one. Rob is torn between wanting what he thinks Laura wants—a dancing career—and his own inability to cope with things at home (son Richie isn’t impressed by Rob’s cooking and even thinks that “Mommy’s bananas are better”). Finally, Rob reluctantly tells Laura about the offer; she is ecstatic because it validates all the work she has been doing, but she refuses the offer because she has proven herself and prefers being a housewife and mother.¹⁰ While complicit with any number of family sitcoms in reinforcing the idea that the woman’s place is in the home, this episode, at least partially, shows the lie that women’s work, whether entertaining or doing

housework, is effortless. When Laura comes home exhausted and stiff, Rob commiserates, “I guess dancing’s rougher than housework,” but Laura refutes it: “Oh, no, nothing’s rougher than housework.”

Class, Gender, and Family Roles in the Sitcoms

23. Narrative and social politics are inextricably intertwined in *I Love Lucy*. Patricia Mellencamp outlines:

Held to the conventional domesticity of situation comedy, Lucy Ricardo was barely in control, constantly attempting to escape domesticity—her “situation,” her job, in the home—always trying to get into show business by getting into Ricky’s “act,” narratively fouling it up, but brilliantly and comically performing in it. (“Situation Comedy” 87)

24. If genre studies form one major strain of sitcom studies, then the other is the examination of the social and political values inscribed in the sitcom. Since the genre is so mainstream, it becomes a thermometer of social mores. For instance, the set-up of *The Nanny* is remarkably old-fashioned for the 1990s: attractive single woman is surrogate mother to the children of an attractive widower—sexual tension ensues. But while individual storylines (throwing a sweet sixteen party for the oldest girl, the young teen boy develops a crush, and so on) could date from the 1950s, nanny Fran Fine’s explicitly Jewish ethnicity and the level of sexual innuendo in the dialogue are indicative of a society more inclusive and less morally restrictive.
25. Class and gender are the main cultural boundaries examined in the literature on the sitcom. Not surprisingly, sitcoms generally display conservative middle-class values, though the reception of the shows can be inflected by gender and class. Andrea Press, for instance, found that working-class women were more likely to receive hegemonic values and images as representative of the real world, while middle-class women were more likely to identify personally with characters, particularly in their family relationships. Lucy was one of the representative characters in Press’s study, and the class difference was quite marked in perceptions of and identification with Lucy. Though both groups found her funny and differentiated “Lucy” from the gifted performer Lucille Ball, middle-class women tended to read her schemes as liberatory, if temporary, escapes from the traps of domesticity, and her centrality to the show as progressive. Working-class women found Lucy manipulative and some even found her skill detracted from the reality of her character. The disruptive qualities that middle-class women admired made the working class women uncomfortable, as she disturbed the domestic order they themselves struggled to maintain.
26. As this study was carried out in the 1980s, about halfway between the “then” of *I Love Lucy* and now, we might hypothesize (realizing that “we” are dancing on the thin ice of speculation) that education and engagement with women’s issues is at least in part responsible for the liberatory response of the middle-class women, and the seemingly “less progressive” response of the working-class women. Yet perhaps the latter group’s discomfort is partly tinged with their own awareness of changing gender roles, a feeling

that they are being left behind. Perhaps they are more acutely aware that Lucy's conservative domestic situation was "natural" and even "positive" in the 1950s but may now be considered "menial" or "subservient," a position which weakens their own sense of self-worth. The changes in cultural roles most certainly influence reception, but they change over time. *I Love Lucy* is still in heavy syndication, so it is still relevant, though one suspects in very different ways from those in the 1950s. More ethnographic research would undoubtedly excavate fascinating strata of experience, though social upheaval and transhistorical viewing patterns undoubtedly also disrupt the clearly defined sedimentary strata of an unmediated/undisturbed cultural geology.

27. Gender roles are among the most volatile aspects of society, affecting almost every facet of life, especially reproduction and family dynamics. When gender roles are in flux, as they have been in post-World War II American society, accompanying anxieties become more acute. One of the more fluid inflections of gender in America, for at least a century, is the association of musicality with femininity, and compounding this, an equation of bodily display with feminization—thus the familiar assumption that male dancers are effeminate and/or homosexual.¹¹
28. Ricky's persona in *I Love Lucy* complicates this issue with a contradictory amalgam of musician, Latin lover, and Desi Arnaz's off-screen "alpha" masculinity as womanizer and technical innovator. Starting at the center ("Ricky Ricardo" as onscreen character construct) and moving outward (to Desi Arnaz, pioneer of the sitcom genre), we find Ricky the musician. Ricky is the one with the musical talent, which he passes on to his son. Drums, which the Ricardo males play, have powerful connotations of masculinity; drums are military instruments, and in many cultures, only men are allowed to play them.¹² The Afro-Caribbean conga, which was Desi Arnaz's primary instrument, also has more explicit sexual meanings in the roughly phallic shape and the "sexual" rhythms. Ricky is also the "Latin lover" type which was so popular in early 20th-century American cinema, from Rudolph Valentino in the 1920s to a number of stars (among them Cesar Romero, Ricardo Montalban, Fernando Lamas, and even Desi Arnaz himself) in the 1940s; this was reinforced by their frequent appearance in musicals and the popularity of Latin dance music in the 1930s and 1940s. Tall, dark, and handsome, the Latin lover was a constant threat to the whitebread American male, so exotic, attractive, and overtly sexual. Always on the prowl, there was a sense that he was "stealing" the "white" woman—this was explicit in Valentino's first smash hit in *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1922).¹³ Yet in his sleek styling and excessive attention to appearance, the Latin lover—at least to the American male—was about empty display and narcissicism that started to turn back on itself as "femininity" and homosexuality. So the Latin lover could seduce but not form healthy marriage bonds—he would either be too predatory or too interested in men.¹⁴ *I Love Lucy* was progressive in depicting Ricky's narcissism as a common source of comedy—defusing it, as it were, by making it his weakness (being a "ham")—and Lucy's frequent fantasy that he was unfaithful was certainly a typical plot device of the time, but those traits in a Latin lover would have been much "safer" portrayed by a WASP, as in *My Favorite Husband*. Arnaz's well-earned real-life reputation as a womanizer would have reinforced many of the Latin lover stereotypes. His technical mastery of the television studio and his many innovations in the production and shooting of a sitcom (the three-camera film shoot before a live audience is probably the most significant) can be

understood as typical traits of “masculine genius.” Yet the dominance of Lucille Ball as the star of the show meant that many of his contributions were not recognized until after his death—a fate more usually reserved for the wife.

29. Within the show, the couple is held in equilibrium by a kind of balance of opposites. Although Lucy dominates the television show, Ricky dominates the family. In the erotics of performance, he—unusually for a man—has the upper hand; the way Arnaz switches from acting to “performing” is on occasion breathtaking (as in the “Babalu” drum performance in the episode “The Ricardos Visit Cuba”). Lucy has two strikes against her: despite Ball’s great physical beauty, neither comedy nor failure are “pretty.”
30. On *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, the Petries are more evenly balanced in power, both in family and in musical/erotic terms. Laura can be counted on to dissolve into the occasional shaky “Oh, Rob!” but she is just as likely to outsmart him, arranging the ultimate surprise party (“A Surprise Surprise is a Surprise”) or turning the tables on him in a practical joke that gets out of hand (“The Two Faces of Rob”). Rob and Laura have equal musical, dance, and comedic skills, though hers are contained in polite femininity, in well-defined female spaces, while his are allowed to be more anarchic and public.
31. While Lucy, along with the sitcom as a genre, is consistently domesticized through the 1950s, a more subtle counterrevolution may be discerned in the development of Laura Petrie. In some of the early episodes, Laura is a more passive or manipulative female—though even in the most extreme case she wields considerable power, explicitly through her skills at entertaining. In “Washington vs. the Bunny,” Rob is forced to make a decision between a business trip and his son’s school play, in which Richie will play “the main bunny.” Tormented, Rob has a dream in which Laura, dressed like a Playboy bunny, manipulates him like a marionette and makes him dance. Along with the dream sequence in “I’d Rather Be Bald Than Have No Head,” in which Laura’s ability to dance is conflated with an ability to fly, and the classic science fiction parody episode “It May Look Like a Walnut,” this remains one of the most surreal moments in American television history. As the series continued, though, Laura became more self-assured; it is not surprising that when Mary Tyler Moore went on to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the first show starring a truly self-sufficient single female, some people perceived her character as an extension of Laura Petrie.
32. If the narrative drive in *I Love Lucy* was outward from the house to the show, *The Dick Van Dyke Show* brought the show into the home. The open floor-plan, with few walls separating living room, dining room, and kitchen, was one of the most popular of post-WWII suburban house designs, both in real houses and in television houses. In contrast to the Ricardos’ rather cramped Manhattan apartment, the Petrie house was a clear example of an open floor-plan, with the kitchen separated off from the living/dining room by a bar with shutters and a swinging door.¹⁵ This large family space was also a place to display the woman, and nowhere is this more explicit than in *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Influential 1950s suburban housing designer Robert Woods Kennedy argued that the task of the housing architect was “to display the housewife ‘as a sexual being’” (Haralovich 44). Laura Petrie moved and danced through this space in her revolutionary, figure-hugging Capri pants, and on numerous occasions, the Petries’ living room literally became

a stage as the characters tried out new ideas for the show, rehearsed for amateur dramatics, entertained one another, or auditioned Rob's sleepwalking brother Stacey for a spot on *The Alan Brady Show*. They made a home movie there of their houseguests the Redcoats (in reality, the popular Merseybeat duo Chad and Jeremy) in a show parodying the Beatles' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* ("The Redcoats are Coming"), flashbacks were commonly launched from conversations held there, and in a Rashomon-like episode ("The Night the Roof Fell In"), Rob, Laura, and the goldfish each gave a different account of an argument held there.

Comedy and the Musical Number

33. In *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, the musical number is held in a domesticized equilibrium, explained by the context of the show, but detached from the familiar unreality of a television series. It is brought into the ideal family home where the performers present not to the diegetic audience, seated around the periphery of the living room, but to the real audiences—the studio audience and the television cameras/television viewers. To paraphrase one of the show's most memorable episodes, it may *look* like a living room, but it is really (in reality as well as metaphorically) a stage.
34. Mike Clarke likens jokes in sitcoms to musical numbers in musicals (105). This is an apt comparison, for both sitcoms and musicals have fairly rigid structures and the pleasure is in the surface detail. However, we can also turn the comparison around, for in some situations, the musical number can function as a joke in and of itself.
35. In his discussion of comedy, via Freud's work on the joke, Eaton describes the typical film industry definition of "screwball comedy" as "dependent on narrative disruption through the gag, etc." That "etc." could encompass a musical number, as Eaton implicitly acknowledges in his amplification: "what . . . designate[s] a product as specifically 'comedy' lies in those excesses—gags, verbal wit, performance skills—which momentarily suspend the narrative" ("Laughter" 22). Eaton slips a little dangerously between verbs in these two parallel definitions, as there is a significant difference between "disruption" and "suspension." The musical number can do either, and through its extended temporal nature, it is likely to disrupt and suspend more than either a verbal or sight gag.
36. In Hollywood musicals, the musical number tends to be a suspension of a moment in time; the classic example would be Gene Kelly's "Singin' in the Rain"—the entire number celebrates Don's giddy feeling after escorting Kathy home. Arias in pre-Wagnerian opera tend to work in exactly the same way. Even numbers that "progress" the narrative (which tend to be more theatrical, as in Rodgers & Hammerstein's trademark not-in-love songs like "People Will Say We're in Love" from *Oklahoma!* or "If I Loved You" from *Carousel*) take more time to accomplish their narrative work than would straight dialogue.
37. Richard Dyer, in "Entertainment and Utopia," has influentially argued that the musical number represents a "utopian" moment, which may be nostalgic or futuristic, but always opens an alternate possibility, for instance, Busby Berkeley's presentation of excess luxury

in his musicals of the Depression-ridden 1930s. On the simplest terms, this utopian moment may be the sheer display of performance skills, often also associated with sexual display. Certainly, this seems to be the dominant mode of the musical number in *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. There are, of course, slapstick set pieces, like the famous lecture on comedy, but they are generally separate from the musical numbers. In classical musicals, even the most anarchic numbers, like “Make ‘Em Laugh” and “Moses Supposes” in *Singin’ in the Rain*, suspend but never actually disrupt the narrative. For examples of the truly disruptive musical number, we would look to films normally categorized as comedies, like those of The Marx Brothers. The slapstick is highly choreographed and integrated with the music; these are as much musical numbers as comedic set-pieces. They exceed suspension and disrupt any narrative that might have been operating, but are also liberatory in their celebration of the disruption.¹⁶

38. Because of the special “situation” of *I Love Lucy*, Lucy’s “disastrous” performances become derailment and narrative goal in one—Lucy wants to get in the show, but she is so bad at performing that she destroys the show. Yet this contradiction is exactly what the narrative needs to climax and return to the point of equilibrium for the next week’s episode. At the same time, it produces the “surface” comedic and musical pleasures that the audience desires. One cannot really consider these utopian moments, not even in the anarchic sense of the Marx Brothers, because of their uncomfortable narrative positioning. We want to see Lucy “do her thing,” but the narrative drive in *I Love Lucy* is stronger than in any Marx Brothers film, and Lucy usually wreaks the damage not on inanimate objects or other characters, but on herself. There is a high degree of masochism in Lucy’s disastrous performances, causing an oscillation between audience identification with her and feelings of superiority over her ineptitude. This very ambivalence has been pinpointed as the crux of the show’s comic effect,¹⁷ and this tension between identification and abjection surfaces again and again throughout the literature on *Lucy*, from the anecdotal¹⁸ to the empirical¹⁹ to the analytical.²⁰

Musical Style and Performance

39. The relationship between the narratives and the type and style of musical performance shows a clear cultural shift in the decade between *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Concomitantly, the two shows exhibit a different kind of star image and awareness of generic conventions.
40. For Lucy, the nightclub is a current reality. Hollywood musicals remain popular with cinema-going audiences. The Latin dance numbers and show tunes performed in the television show are the popular music of the day (though the occasional vaudeville number is portrayed as nostalgic). Musical numbers take place in a logical space, at the club or, if at home, in rehearsal. The idea of a musical number does not intrude into the diegesis.
41. The characters of Lucy and Ricky are clearly and intentionally based on the performers themselves. Desi Arnaz was a popular singer and bandleader; a residency at a New York City nightclub was about the right level of success for him, had he not gone into

television. Lucille Ball's fame from the movies came from her portrayal of glamorous, sharp-witted sexpots in *film noir* and showbiz comedies, and her radio stint as ditsy Liz Cooper in *My Favorite Husband* prepared the way for Lucy Ricardo. She was never a song-and-dance star—even in musicals, she tended to be more of a showgirl than a performer in the more active sense—so little conflict existed between her image and the talents (or lack thereof) of her character.²¹

42. *The Dick Van Dyke Show* has a different relationship to the musical number. The variety show is, like the nightclub, a current reality; however, as discussed before, *The Alan Brady Show* itself is denied. On the few occasions that it is featured, there are stylistic reasons: the Redcoats must be seen on television, as the episode parodies the Beatles' *Ed Sullivan Show* appearance; "The Alan Brady Show Presents" is a Christmas special diegetically and extradiegetically at once. The musical number is primarily framed as in a film musical, accentuated by the numbers in the flashback episodes. The critical dance number which symbolizes the Petries' courtship explicitly references one of the most intimate love duets in all film musicals, "You Wonderful You" from *Summer Stock* (1950). Laura's partner encourages Rob to "steal" the dance, saying, "Why not? We stole it from Gene Kelly." The association with Judy Garland and Gene Kelly, rather than the arch, sophisticated duo Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, seems appropriate for Van Dyke and Moore, particularly in this film: *Summer Stock* was shot as Garland's emotional and drug problems at MGM came to a head, and the scenes with her old friend Kelly glow with a tender passion that mirrors the open love and sexuality of Rob and Laura Petrie.
43. To some extent, Van Dyke and Moore borrow personae, for they did not come to the television series with the same sort of images that Arnaz and Ball did. Although clearly possessed of the talent to be musical stars (both stars would be in film musicals, but during or after the run of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*²²), the cinematic terrain had shifted in the late 1950s, and musicals were just not being made in the same way or in the same numbers as before. The form went out of favor, as did its content. The show acknowledged the more complex musical landscape of the 1960s by presenting a wide variety of styles: vintage Tin Pan Alley songs and show tunes predominated, along with Latin dance music and novelty numbers, and calypso, beat jazz, rock and roll, British Invasion pop, and the Twist all made their appearance—though these newer and/or more marginalized styles were recuperated in the narratives. Stacey Petrie's rock and roll number parodies Marlon Brando; the Redcoats win the adults over with their cheeky humor, in the same way The Beatles did; "The Twizzle" appears as The Twist was discovered by adults (1962) over a year after its initial popularity among teenagers (1960);²³ and the manager-father of the young man who performs the novelty dance-song refuses to let him perform it on *The Alan Brady Show* unless he also sings "This Nearly Was Mine" from *South Pacific*, to prove he "really" has talent.
44. *The Dick Van Dyke Show* performs for television much the same function that Feuer in "The Self-Reflexive Musical" argues that the musicals of the MGM "Golden Era" perform for the musical film: perpetuating the myths of entertainment; the myth of integration, which implies that achieving personal fulfillment and performance are intertwined; and the myth of spontaneity, which implies that musical performance is

natural and does not take work. In other words, entertainment breaks down the barriers between art and life.²⁴

45. Feuer also comments that “intertextuality and star iconography can be a means of manipulating audience response” (“The Self-Reflexive Musical” 340). I would argue that *The Dick Van Dyke Show* takes this a couple of steps further—first, in the transferal of star iconography (not a recognition of Dick Van Dyke, but an association with Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly²⁵), and second, in the more overt self-reflexivity of *The Alan Brady Show*. This self-conscious self-awareness peaks in the last episode of the series. In “The Last Chapter,” Rob’s autobiography is bought by Alan Brady. The writing of the autobiography has been the source of many of the flashbacks, at least one of which is revealed to be false (“Will You Two Be My Wife”). Brady intends to turn the book into a television series, a narrative flourish that almost, if not completely, implies that the show that we watched every week was actually the proposed series.

Shifting Styles and Expulsion from the Narrative

46. As film musicals fade from popularity, the musical number fades from the sitcom as well—at least in the narrative form we saw in *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. The cataclysmic changes in popular music from the mid-1950s were partly responsible for both trends. Rock and roll was the biggest revolution in popular music in thirty years, a revolution that, like jazz before it, was charged with racial and sexual challenges to the mainstream norm, particularly the white suburban domesticity fostered by the sitcom. But whereas jazz had only the gramophone and the print media to document its emergence into pop culture, the advent of rock and roll coincided with the availability of cheap record players and 45-rpm singles, a boom in AM radio stations, and, of course, television. Indeed, it is an oft-asserted truism that the collusion of television and rock and roll killed the musical (in reality, it probably had more to do with the demise of the studio system, but that, too, was affected by television).
47. The first sitcom to really embrace the new music did so, ironically, from within its domestic setup. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* was, like *I Love Lucy* and *The Burns and Allen Show*, based around a real-life showbiz family, bandleader Ozzie Nelson, his singer-wife Harriet (Harmon) Nelson, and their two sons, David and Ricky. Unlike the other sitcoms, however, the Nelson family stressed the family, not the show; in fact, one really never knew what Ozzie did for a living, though one strongly suspected that Ozzie the television father was not Ozzie the bandleader. When young Ricky took up music, like millions of other American boys, it became part of the show. Ricky Nelson was not merely another pretty-faced teen idol, but perhaps one of the underrated icons of early rock and roll, fitting somewhere between Elvis Presley and the Everly Brothers in his rockabilly profile. With his sweet face and clean-cut image, he brought rock and roll to a mainstream audience in as non-threatening a guise as possible, while also paving the way for other teen idols (most notably Paul Petersen of *The Donna Reed Show*) to parley television success into record success—a path consequently trod by others including John Travolta (*Welcome Back, Kotter*), Brandy (*Moesha*), and Will Smith (*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*).²⁶ The teen idol became a safety valve between the adult mainstream world of

the sitcom and the rebellious youth world of rock and roll. It became such a cliché that when Roseanne did a parodic version of a 1950s sitcom, the son DJ (nicknamed “The DeeJ” in an homage to *Leave It to Beaver*) left the football team in order to play “the rock and roll music,” much to the consternation of his father—revisiting with a satirical slant the concerns over normative gender roles in 1950s sitcoms.

48. The teen idol was also a point of contact between television and the charts: after the initial upheaval of rock and roll, after Elvis Presley was drafted, Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens were killed, and Chuck Berry sent to prison, there was a space in the late 1950s and early 1960s where pop music was dominated by teen idols like Frankie Avalon, Paul Anka, and Fabian, and the last gasp of Tin Pan Alley, symbolized by the Brill Building, Motown, and the girl groups. Popular music was a highly contested space in the 1960s—more than is generally acknowledged by pop historians who tend to dwell on one side of the musical divide or the other, and who perpetuate the myth that once rock and roll arrived, there was a complete capitulation. In fact, for over a decade, the charts remained split between the styles generally favored by adults and those of the younger generation. As sitcoms aimed for a broad mainstream audience, this lack of consensus only discouraged writers and producers further. The wide variety of music on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* would have only just been acceptable to the adult, white, middle-class mainstream, and, as we have seen, the show worked rather hard to make sure of this.
49. What happened to the musical number in the 1960s and the 1970s? Whereas I have discussed the musical number in *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* as narrative suspensions or disruptions, they are still integrated into the narrative—Ricky stages a show at the club that Lucy wants to get into, or there is a troublesome guest star or skit on *The Alan Brady Show*. The connection may, at times, be rather tenuous, but the number still carries some narrative weight. What tends to happen later is that the musical number returns to a state closer to that of the variety show—or even the “removable” musical number common in classic-era movie musicals, in which African-American artists performed songs and dances that were designed to be entertaining and popular, but which could be safely removed in racist markets without harming the narrative flow. Often, these musical numbers were predicated not on narrative necessity or even interest, but either as an opportunity to give the actors a chance to display talents not normally called upon, or to highlight guest stars.²⁷
50. The former was how *The Brady Bunch* transformed from a sitcom (1969–74) to a variety show (1977). It started with a “talent show” that was so popular that musical performances began to be dropped into the show with increasing regularity. Three years after its cancellation, the show was briefly revived as *The Brady Bunch Hour*. It was not successful, commercially or generically, as TVTome comments:

The premise of “The Brady Bunch Hour” is hard to understand. The Brady family was chosen to star in a variety show on ABC. They left their familiar two story home somewhere in southern California for a place on the beach. (The first installment had a completely different living room set from both the rest of the installments and the original series.) The series includes not only “the variety show on ABC,” but also the behind-the-scenes doings of the Bradys as they go about making their variety series. There were also some sketches

which were more or less a continuation of the original “Brady Bunch” episodes and which had nothing to do with the “ABC variety series.” Unfortunately, the seams between the two modes are not clear, and this results in continuity errors such as Rip Taylor playing a character named Jack Merrill on the variety show, but the Bradys also know him as Mr. Merrill when they’re not on TV, and the Bradys announce him as “our own Rip Taylor” in the opening and closing. It is not always clear what the Bradys are doing or what audience they are playing to.

Including guest stars was the main mode for musical performance in *Happy Days* (1974–84), which looked back to the “let’s play rock and roll” mode of the 1950s by having the boys form a band that occasionally played at Arnold’s hamburger joint where Fonzie even danced once. But the most memorable performances were by glam-rocker Suzi Quatro as “Leather Tuscadero and the Suedes.” Marking a kind of middle ground between showcasing cast members’ talent and including guest stars, one of the co-stars of the *Happy Days* spin-off *Laverne & Shirley* (1976–83) was MGM musicals veteran Betty Garrett, who had been in such classics as *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* (1948) and *On the Town* (1949) paired with Frank Sinatra. Despite her talent, Garrett did not perform musical numbers on *Laverne & Shirley* while most of the performance was by a secondary character Carmine “The Big Ragu” Ragusa (Eddie Mekka).

51. In none of these cases was the musical number really an integral part of the show’s identity—even when people think of *The Brady Bunch*, it is much more about the trials and tribulations of the kids, although the tacky-glitz of the costumes and the upbeat performance styles are sometimes referenced. And in the case of two shows which are more remembered for their music than their stories—*The Monkees* (1966–68) and *The Partridge Family* (1970–74)—the musical number was even more resolutely outside the narrative.
52. As its ABC Friday timeslot-mate *The Brady Bunch* came to be, *The Partridge Family* was about a performing family. (Even at the age of eight or nine, I can remember being aware as a viewer that *The Brady Bunch*’s increasing reliance on musical performance was responding to the popularity of *The Partridge Family*.) Both these families were reflective of a different kind of family than was the norm in sitcoms, but that were increasingly common in American society: the Bradys were a blended family, Shirley Partridge was a single mom. In some ways, *The Partridge Family* re-oriented the old show-musical trajectory of couple-formation to family-formation, at least in the pilot episode. At the beginning, the mother is shown to be somewhat unaware of the ambitions of her music-making children; when she joins the group at the last minute, she is integrated with them, and at least partly becomes “one of the kids.” It is in music that they are closest as a family, but the numbers exist primarily as adjuncts to the narrative. Only very rarely do the songs relate to the narrative, and then only obliquely. They do not further the plots, and are often edited in such a way that they are not even as integral as the living-room performances at the Petries. At most, they might be the end-point of an adventurous trip, or the reason the family finds itself at a certain location. On a couple of occasions, they perform for charity events after being moved by the plight of those whom they meet on their travels, but this is not usually the case.

53. *The Monkees* was an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the Beatles' frenetic film *A Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester, 1964—that film also owes a significant debt to silent film comedies and Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen's film version of *On the Town* (1949)). *The Monkees'* narratives were silly and fantastical, but even at that, the musical numbers were completely unrelated to what was happening. Occasionally, they were even shifted from one episode to another. They were simply islands of music and quick-cut editing that prefigured the independent music video.
54. Musical numbers did not disappear. Indeed, they may seem more prominent if only because they do not blend into the fabric of the narrative. Ironically, via music video and innovative dramas, the musical number has made an integrated return to the sitcom, though at a different conceptual point.

From Narrative Disruption to Generic Disruption

55. The integrated musical number re-emerged in television during the 1980s, a period in which the generations again reached a sort of consensus on popular music. Concurrently, the rise of music video and the increased use of popular music in film made music in sitcoms and other television programs more acceptable, as genre boundaries were crossed and re-crossed with ever-increasing self-reflexivity.²⁸ Although not sitcoms per se, Michael Mann's *Miami Vice* (1984–89) and Glenn Gordon Caron's *Moonlighting* (1985–89) were particularly instrumental in bringing the musical number back into television (and indeed, even into film), though in different ways. *Miami Vice* took the music video style and applied it to narrative, with quick editing accelerating classical montage technique, and music commenting on, or even in dialogue with, the drama (see Stilwell "In the Air Tonight" for examples). The music was almost exclusively non-diegetic, giving it a narrative power often reserved for the omniscient voice-over narrator—both occupy a god-like conceptual space, overseeing the action in all times and spaces. Non-diegetic underscore also unites time and space across editing, but the presence of the semantic content of song lyrics in underscore makes the non-diegetic song far more "present" or "heard," to riff on Claudia Gorbman's influential title, than instrumental underscore.²⁹ *Moonlighting*, although like *Miami Vice* an hour-long show, was very similar to a sitcom in its style and pacing and used musical performance as one way of breaking the "fourth wall," a significant feature of the show. Characters, particularly David Addison (Bruce Willis), would confront the camera and comment upon the action, the characters, or even the show's timeslot. The postmodern play of reference that flooded the show's dialogue was often also musical, from brief lyric references to a full-blown mock-Gilbert & Sullivan operetta number in a prisonyard ("Cool Hand Dave").³⁰ Between them, these two shows exploded conventions about the way music could be used in television, thereby reshaping the use of music in sitcoms as well. They had some technological advantages over the sitcom in that they were normally shot on film and edited like movies, as opposed to the multi-camera, live-audience shoots of the average sitcom, but they also opened up new possibilities. Building on this influence, different sitcoms incorporated music in increasingly varied ways.

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56. The musical numbers in *The Cosby Show* (1984–92) were not normally intended to be funny. They were performing more serious cultural work, introducing and reinforcing a sense of African-American history and accomplishment. Jazz legends were literally brought into the family as grandparents or other relatives; cast members were given the opportunity to display their talents, usually without irony. They were narratively uncomplicated, presented as performance and meant to be appreciated as such. They are the closest to *The Partridge Family* mode of framing a musical number, although the famous lip-synching of “Night Time is the Right Time” by the entire Huxtable family bears traces of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*’s living room performances.
57. Slightly more self-conscious are the occasional numbers in *The Nanny* (1993–99). For the first couple of years, this sitcom set in the home of a producer of Broadway musicals was surprisingly music-less. Butler Niles (Daniel Davis) proves to be a proficient singer (“What the Butler Sung”), but more often it is the antics of nanny Fran Fine (Fran Drescher) that result in musical numbers that verge on the chaotic. The resemblance of this situation to that of *I Love Lucy* passes no one by, not least the writers and performers of *The Nanny*, as references to the earlier show come in Fran’s exaggerated cry or Mr. Sheffield’s (the Broadway producer, head of house-hold, played by Charles Shaughnessy) Cuban-accented call, “Miss Fine! You’ve got some ’splainin’ to do!” Nostalgia shades over into postmodern reference in the most obvious way, while highlighting a shift in gender and class roles. It is Niles who really “wants to get in the show” (he has written a play that he wants Max Sheffield to produce and often slips it into his boss’s pile of scripts), but Max often counters by telling or demonstrating to Niles how much he needs him to keep his house—it is Niles who is also trapped in a stifling domesticity. As the series progressed, the ambiguous gender-positioning of Niles is frequently the source of comedy, from his wearing of a frilly apron and carrying a feather duster (the classic “French maid” outfit) to his desire to see Fran’s union with Max. He is both girlfriend (or gay friend) and mother figure to Fran, a domestic “wife” to Max, and eventually sexually paired with spinster socialite CC, a tall, statuesque blonde whom he often taunts about her “masculinity,” crossing class boundaries in a way more often associated with women—marrying up.
58. In most sitcoms of the 1980s and 1990s, the musical number’s function migrated from the gag as narrative disruption to the gag as generic disruption. Neale and Eaton argue that audience recognition of the play with generic conventions is often indispensable to the functioning of comedy narrative (see Neale “Psychoanalysis” and Eaton “Laughter”). After such a long absence, the presence of a musical number in the narrative confines of a familiar genre like the sitcom transgresses genre-boundaries in a way that provokes comedy, giving lie to Eaton’s assertion that “... whilst comedy can be directed against anything, it cannot be analytical of anything” (“Laughter” 25). For do we not, on some level, have to analyze the conventions in order to recognize their transgressions?
59. The musical numbers in *Perfect Strangers* (1986–93) are the most transparent example of the musical number functioning as comedy sheerly on the disjunctive quality of its insertion into the narrative.³¹ The format of the series is conservative in the extreme, an age-old tale of the innocent set adrift in the cold, cruel world with the assistance of an

only slightly more worldly character who suffers under the delusion that he knows what he is doing; the innocent is always the savior. The musical numbers are continually initiated by the innocent Balki (Bronson Pinchot), who, through infectious enthusiasm and/or dogged insistence, drags his down-to-earth American cousin Larry (Mark Linn-Baker) into performing with him. Unlike Lucy (as opposed to Lucille Ball), Balki and Larry and Pinchot and Linn-Baker are accomplished singers and dancers; the numbers are performed to a high standard—they are not slapstick. The comedy stems from the unrealistically unworldly Balki's encyclopedic knowledge of popular culture, also the innocent incongruity of breaking into song and dance in the middle of a living room, or a workplace, frequently with harmonies and complex choreography that clearly require previous devising and rehearsal.

60. Demonstrating even more dramatically the disruptive possibility of a musical number is an early episode of *Murphy Brown* (1988–98) in which a gunman takes the fictional *FYI* television news team hostage. The gunman disrupts the “narrative” of their broadcast, in effect subverting their narrative with his own, but after several abortive attempts to regain control of the situation, the team inadvertently discovers an unlikely manner of neutralizing the situation. The number becomes increasingly complex and fluent, until the gunman screams at them in frustration to shut up. Their musical performance disrupts his “narrative” of control. While this number seems to emerge “naturally” from the situation (even though, in real terms, it is obviously carefully staged), it nonetheless also disrupts a narrative trajectory, albeit one internal to the overarching narrative of the episode.
61. In more overtly satirical shows like *The Simpsons* (1989–present; another example of a sitcom that developed out of a recurring skit from a variety show, *The Tracey Ullmann Show* (1987–90)), or *Third Rock from the Sun* (1996–2001), the musical number falls somewhere between a Brechtian distancing and sheer surface play.³² *The Simpsons'* musical numbers may be parodies (“Springfield, Springfield” rather than “New York, New York,” including the misplaced accentuation inherent in the transposition) or pastiches, but they tend to be framed like classical musical numbers. In *Third Rock from the Sun*, they are much more disruptive, narrative non sequiturs, or hyperbolic reactions: when Dick finds out that Mary likes show tunes, he instigates a choral rendition of “Oklahoma!” in a snowed-in truck stop where the song's originator, musical theater legend John Raitt, “happens” to be present; the cast breaks into an impromptu Riverdance parody after emerging from a performance of “King of the Jig;” the aliens find themselves helpless in the face of Eddy Grant's “Electric Avenue,” as it compels their human bodies to get funky. Then there are the dream sequences in the 3-D episode “Nightmare on Dick Street,” which convince the aliens that they are losing their minds because they have never experienced dreams before. Likewise, the distinctive and frequent musical numbers in *The Drew Carey Show* (1995–present) operate almost always as fantasies—one of the very oldest type of musical number. However, the very fact that song and dance are there at all again represents the musical number as generic joke.
62. Ironically, the most widely publicized use of musical numbers in television in the past dozen years, in Steven Bochco's hour long police drama *Cop Rock* (1990), proves the dangers of generic disruption. The attempt to blend gritty urban police drama with musical numbers was a notorious failure. Despite Bochco's proven track record in producing

quality police drama (most especially the ground-breaking *Hill Street Blues* (1981–87)), a roster of songwriters that included Randy Newman and Amanda McBroom, and some stunning set pieces, most audiences were unable to adjust to the radical shifts of register between realistic drama and the fantasy quality of a musical number—the reaction? Laughter. What is crucial for one genre is deadly for another.

Genre Blending

63. While the musical number now operates as a generic disruption, it has also been reintegrated into the narrative. The sitcom has developed into a more sophisticated and flexible genre, often incorporating a more realistic view of life, which does not demand resolution at the end of every half-hour. Repetition starts to shade over into progression.
64. While *Murphy Brown* was abrasive and satirical and had its disruptive moments, the musical number in *Murphy Brown* tended to be more realistic: though still comedic, it carried an unusual poignancy. Most commonly, as in the first episode, the number is performed by Murphy at the end of a long day—like Joel Goodson (Tom Cruise) in *Risky Business*, she turns on the stereo and sings along uninhibitedly. On an obvious level, Murphy's utter inability to carry a tune is a kind of musical slapstick; it is also a leveling factor that, like Lucy's lack of talent, and can be read in a number of ways. It is a kind of containment—Murphy is successful in her career as television news reporter, but she is hopeless at one thing that she loves—a symbol of her frustrated personal life. It is also a kind of liberation—away from the stresses of her job, in the protected space of her living room, she can indulge in her musical passions. Music is a constant in Murphy's life, and participates in intratextual references with 1960s R&B in general and Aretha Franklin's performance of Carole King's "(You Make Me Feel Like a) Natural Woman" in particular. Murphy sings this song at the end of the first episode, and later in the series tries to sing it with Aretha Franklin; the song is given a whole new meaning when she sings it to her newborn son.
65. The generations of the Brown family are also brought together through a common appreciation of music. Murphy's mother, Avery, embraces the music of her youth (Billie Holiday) just as her daughter does, and baby Avery (named after her mother, after a protracted gag emulating the running secretary joke and subsequent nanny joke) develops an "unfortunate" attachment to Barry Manilow. The year-long running joke caused by the conflicting musical tastes of mother and child is defused at Avery's first birthday party, when he is serenaded by Manilow himself. The incongruity of the situation, Murphy's exasperation, the appreciation of the real Manilow's ability to take all the ribbing and even participate in it, and the lyrics of the song "I Am Your Child" layer irony and humor. Cynics may dismiss these occasions as sentimental piffle, but in the context of an otherwise brash show, they are a touch of the power music holds in real life—music's power may be a myth, but the persistence of that myth makes it a difficult one to dislodge.
66. In a nostalgic show like *The Wonder Years* (1988–93), music's ability to evoke memory and emotion is particularly powerful. Unlike most sitcoms, the half-hour show was shot on film³³ and is more of a half-hour drama with comedic elements. As is more common

for dramas, the music tends to be non-diegetic, and along with other generic markers, the way music is used also crosses genre boundaries. Popular music is especially useful in establishing time period, as in this show set in the early 1970s, and as we can also note in the time-traveling science fiction show *Quantum Leap* (1989–93), as well as in such jukebox films as *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973) and *The Big Chill* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1983). Like *The Big Chill*, *The Wonder Years* has a dual historical setting. This is more obvious in *The Big Chill*, where friends who meet in 1983 are gauging how much their lives have changed since their college years in the 1960s. Motown songs provide the soundtrack of their idealistic youth. In *The Wonder Years*, the diegetic setting is clearly in the past, but the voiceover narrative is that of young Kevin Arnold all grown up. The music gains significance from the adult Kevin Arnold's point of view, not only establishing his place in the past but his emotions in the present. These are perhaps not best called "musical numbers" but "musical moments."

67. *Scrubs* (2001–present), a sitcom spoof of medical dramas, is emerging as one of the most adventurous shows yet in its use of music. There is nothing particularly innovative about any of the techniques used, but their breadth is unusual. In contrast to a show like *Ally McBeal*, where certain elements became part of the style and predictable in key situations, *Scrubs*' use of music is irregular and therefore unpredictable, keeping that sense of the unexpected that can be funny, or occasionally dramatic. In an early episode ("My Best Friend's Mistake"), a recording of Erasure's "A Little Respect" played during an operation develops into a musical number similar to *Murphy Brown*'s "You Keep Me Hanging On," drawing in the various characters. Yet, the song itself is not such a literal joke—it has significant emotional resonance for the characters. The show often features a pensive non-diegetic musical finale, showing a montage of characters under a commentative song—but usually overlaid with idealistic inter JD's (Zach Braff) reflective commentary (the show bears similarities to both *M*A*S*H* and *The Wonder Years*); this "adagio finale" is a convention of hour-long television drama from *Miami Vice* through to *Ally McBeal*. "Beautiful World," by singer-songwriter Colin Hay, is the playout of "My Last Day," the final episode of the first season—the song is the ironic coda to a series of devastating personal revelations made by a vindictive Jordan (Christa Miller), the ex-wife of JD's minor/nemesis Perry Cox (John C. McGinley), that drives all the characters apart. Then, Colin Hay himself appears as a troubadour in the first episode of the second season ("My Overkill"). He has an intriguingly ambiguous presence, appearing onscreen, but magically transcending place and time through the continuity of edits, achieving a fluidity usually associated with non-diegetic music. He interacts with the characters "silently" in terms of dialogue, but they react to his presence with quizzical glances as if recognizing the non-diegetic music "in the flesh," and he appears to haunt JD, following him from the street to the hospital and into the morgue. Finally, Dr. Cox takes Hay's guitar and smashes it against a wall in annoyance—the troubadour helpfully offers, "I have other songs."
68. More overtly comic, "My Way or the Highway" is *Scrubs*' parody of *West Side Story*, a musicalization of the competition between the medical and surgical interns that features regularly on the show.³⁴ Yet one of the most emotional moments in the entire series is also the most theatrical: in "My Philosophy," a vibrant young woman awaits a heart transplant but is realistic about her chances. She speaks of going out "like in a Broadway musical." This narrative cue is fulfilled at the end when she dies and the entire cast participates in a

big Broadway ballad number, which is clearly framed as a fantasy, fading in and out on her empty hospital bed. The pensive finale and the theatrical number are combined into one powerful gesture.

69. In a bittersweet comedy like *Scrubs*, music's usual position as a gag has been inverted, whether narratively or generically. This sitcom draws on both the unexpectedness of register-shifting that could easily provoke laughter, and music's dramatic and emotional power, heightening its effect with this double-switch. But in certainly the most self-reflexive of musical commentary in the show, the sepulchral hospital lawyer Ted (Sam Lloyd) incongruously turns out to be part of a barbershop quartet: their repertoire? Sitcom theme songs.³⁵

Histories and Rituals

70. The presence of sitcom re-runs on television—especially when self-consciously framed as on Nick at Nite or TV Land, and intertwined with the availability of old films on television and video—creates new sets of references that are, if not completely ahistorical, then based in a less-than-linear history. This media- and technology-based persistence of memory gives rise to two divergent impulses: the classicizing, or canon-building, which sets up some shows as “great,” and the more relativizing reception that views sitcoms from various historical periods on a level playing field. Home video releases tend to reinforce the formation of a canon, as does the prevalence of certain syndicated shows: in America, the sheer number of times over the average lifetime that one has had an opportunity to see *I Love Lucy* makes it common cultural currency; in England, *The Phil Silvers Show*—a show rarely seen in American syndication—holds a similar position. The profusion of fairly undifferentiated syndicated re-runs on independent stations allows for relativizing (of course, a certain initial commercial success is necessary in order to generate enough episodes for “stripping,” or showing an episode every weekday without undue repetition). More specialized cable channels have more flexibility: Nick at Night can actually serve both functions, screening full evenings of stripped classics; The Paramount Comedy Channel in England can strip shows like *Frasier* and *Cheers*, mixing them in with shows like *Flying Blind* and *Girls on Top* which did not generate all that many episodes, but which have a quirky appeal or started the careers of stars.
71. The presence of musical numbers in classic American sitcoms, especially significant ones like *I Love Lucy* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, makes them generically available, as a comparison with British sitcoms highlights (the British film industry never really grasped the musical genre, either). British sitcoms, with very few exceptions, tend to be even more conservative in form and content than American ones, and very, very few offer musical numbers. Two exceptions that do, have extra-generic reasons for doing so. *Goodnight, Sweetheart* (1993–99) is about Gary, a time-traveling bigamist, with one wife in the 1990s and one in wartime 1940s. Gary pretends to be a songwriter to explain his lack of a 1940s occupation, and he continually passes off songs written after the war as his own work. A simple historical disjunction creates the joke: laughter invariably ensues as he performs a Beatles or Elton John song in a World War II setting.

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72. The short-lived *The High Life* (1994) was a surreal farce with a Busby Berkeley-style credit sequence. This opening sequence immediately lets the viewer know that this is a high-camp world of gay men, or men coded as gay (Steve McCracken (Forbes Masson) and Sebastian Flyte (Alan Cumming) are, most stereotypically, air stewards), who communicate through pop culture references that are themselves a kind of “code”—even Steve’s apparently heterosexual obsession with a fellow female flight attendant is because she reminds him of the mermaid Marina from Gerry Anderson’s puppet show *Stingray* (1963). While Steve is off romancing with her in the swimming pool to Aqua Marina’s theme song, Sebastian is tucked up in bed under his *Stingray* duvet with an array of skin-care products (their flight crew chief Shona McSpurtle (Siobhan Redmond) pops in to borrow some from him). The overt display of and play with coded communication is one of the pleasures of camp—flaunting the secret while connecting clearly with those “in the know,” and the profusion of pop culture references offer an abundance of entry points for the enjoyment of the show.
73. In its six episodes, the storylines of *The High Life* became increasingly absurd (having spent months on finding the perfect Eurovision song title—“Piff Paff Puff”—the boys need to write the song over the weekend; a crazed cookie mogul kidnaps Sebastian and Shona in search of the perfect oatcake recipe) and the cross-references to other genres and cultural moments grew denser, encompassing corporate anthems, the Eurovision Song Contest, the 1960s *Batman* television series, *Star Trek*, and Torvill & Dean’s 1984 Olympic Bolero.³⁶ Song lyrics and titles commonly infested the dialogue. Here, the musical number operates on multiple levels, offering pleasure through interlocking recognition and appreciation: the number itself as a display of performance skill; the referential nature of the number, whether recalling general or specific other cultural forms or texts; the disjunction—or even more potently, the unexpected correlation—between a musical number and its (a)historical referent; and a second order of performance skill based on the incorporation of previous genres into new ones. The extremity of a series like *The High Life* pushes genre borders to their breaking point, but in doing so it points up quite clearly how these border transgressions operate.
74. The sitcom is very much like a popular song—most examples have more or less the same form; the pleasure is in the details. Though surprisingly persistent, and very common in two of the most popular and enduring of sitcoms, the musical number has also become a foreign object in the narrative of the sitcom, and this foreignness renders it even more comedic. It provides pleasure in both its plenitude—the skill of performance—and its lack—the disruption of narrative and generic coherence. Sitcoms’ repetitive and cyclical nature has led at least one influential scholar to ascribe a ritual function to the sitcom, a reinforcement of cultural values through crisis and resolution (Newcomb 28). In an increasingly secular society, for better or for worse, the sitcom probably wields broader cultural power than most other rituals.³⁷ And most cultures—ours included, it seems—tend to celebrate their rituals with singing and dancing.

* My thanks to Rachel Moseley and Stan Hawkins for casting a critical eye over previous drafts of this paper, Mitchell Morris as always for clarifying discussions, and the *ECHO* reader whose comments allowed me to open up elements of analysis that were slighted earlier.

1. The analogy of Indians in Westerns and musical numbers in sitcoms is one that has caused intense reaction among some readers and none among others. I would like to highlight that the analogy comes from Feuer where it merely registers presence or absence: she chooses “Indians” as her representative example, but she could have chosen ten-gallon hats, gunslingers, pearl-handled revolvers, or sheriffs, and the meaning would not change. However, I realize that for many people this term and the analogy causes some consternation and I am certainly sensitive to and aware of the dangers of misreading the analogy. As someone whose family came off an Oklahoma reservation within the last century, I am certainly sensitive to the history behind the term “Indian”—yet among many individuals and communities with which I am familiar, the identity “Indian” (or “Indin”) is still preferred to “Native American,” which imposes a colonial identity upon indigenous peoples that attempts to neutralize the force of historical oppression in a way that the “misidentification” of “Indian” continually threatens to expose. In Feuer’s analogy regarding the Western movie, these peoples were always already “Indians,” in the stereotyped and misrepresented sense. Only in the most recent Westerns has any real attempt been made to redress that unequal power representation. Ironically, perhaps the most narratively/politically successful of these attempts was in Simon Wincer’s 1990 comedy *Quigley Down Under*, in which the treatment of Australian indigenous peoples “stands for” the genocide and relocation of the North American “aborigines.” This reinforces, rather than negates, the power of the metaphor.

2. Almost all the shows on the list were newer, which strongly tends to slant such unscientific lists (i.e., *Seinfeld* was listed as “best show,” but the resonance of that show has not yet proved as profound as these two). Significantly, however, they both were among the oldest shows in the top 50; among their contemporaries only *The Honeymooners* (#3; 1955–56) is a sitcom. Other shows of the same vintage all rated lower and include variety shows (*The Ed Sullivan Show*, #15; 1948–71, and *Your Show of Shows*, #30; 1951–54); a news/entertainment show (*The Today Show*, #17; 1952–present); dramatic anthologies (*The Twilight Zone*, #26; 1959–64, and *Playhouse 90*, #33; 1956–60); and dramas (*The Defenders*, #31; 1961–65, *Gunsmoke*, #40; 1955–75, and *Bonanza*, #43; 1959–73).

3. Other influential books that appeared about the same time include Dyer, *Light Entertainment* and Newcomb.

4. Several episodes of this radio program were rewritten as episodes of *I Love Lucy*, and some of them can be found on the recent DVD releases of *I Love Lucy*, matched with their “remakes.”

5. Doty points out the large contingent of “non-star” performers from film, nightclub, and vaudeville who transferred to television, though he does not explicitly make the connection to musicals (3).

6. Of course, there is an immediate and somewhat unavoidable danger of conflating what the sponsor or network wants, what they perceive the audience to want, what the audience really wants, and what seems evident that the audience wants based on the texts of shows that continue

to be popular decades after their original run. A detailed ethnography is beyond the scope of the present article—and is, indeed, often no longer possible due to the contamination of reruns and the vagaries of memory—but this difference should be kept in mind. On the other side of the equation, Meaghan Morris pointedly warns of the danger of academics who want to understand culture by talking to “the people,” but who then, even with the best will in the world and the intent of empowering “the people,” appropriate and recast those voices within the frame of their own academic discourse. While recognizing and appreciating the complexity of this dilemma, as academics we must also accept the occasional partial collapse of these analytical points of view, or we will never be able to venture into new territory.

7. The paradigm of the family sitcom is so strong that this overrides almost every other consideration, but it was not yet firmly set in the early 1950s. Doty discusses the increasing domesticity of *I Love Lucy*—the birth of Little Ricky, the move to suburban Connecticut near the end of the show’s run—bringing it more in line with the family shows such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. This is the background against which *The Dick Van Dyke Show* introduced its “revolutionary” dual setting of home and workplace.

8. A more optimistic but still paternalistic reading would see Ricky’s resistance to Lucy’s desire for performance as protecting her from inevitable humiliation.

9. We are rarely taken past that point in musicals; however, one of the few musicals that addresses the role of the female performer after marriage, *Everything I Have Is Yours* (1953—right at the height of *I Love Lucy*’s run) starred the married dance duo Marge and Gower Champion. Audiences would have been aware of their marital status, and the characters are therefore relatively easy to elide with the stars, who it must be said had very little in the way of personas beyond that of a married couple who danced together. The plot revolves around the tension between the traditional domestic role of wife and mother (the film begins as Pamela discovers her pregnancy) and the more glamorous one of musical comedy star, though both are shown to be hard work.

10. The episode “My Part-Time Wife” deploys very similar arguments when Laura volunteers to type for the writers while Sally pursues a more visible television career on a talk show. When Laura contributes a very funny joke to the script, Rob is threatened. Laura has been conspiring with the social pressures that render a woman’s work “invisible” (see Haralovich) by doing the cooking and cleaning in the middle of the night and napping at lunchtime, none of which Rob even notices. Yet it is Laura who must reassure her husband that she would rather be at home, and that she only came to work to help him. Sally returns to the fold when she upstages the talk show host and is fired/quits. This is an excellent example of returning the narrative to a state of equilibrium—both women have been displaced and both must be brought back to their original places.

11. This is so ingrained and so insidious that it affects the boundaries of sports. Despite their obvious physical demands, exclusively female sports like synchronized swimming and rhythmic gymnastics are not viewed as “real” sports, while darts and snooker, which take practically no physical conditioning at all, are (at least in Britain). One of the reasons, sometimes even explicitly stated, that figure skating is not deemed a sport by some sports fans and journalists is that it is “sissy.” Synchronized swimming, rhythmic gymnastics, and figure skating have in

common music and dance. Even more explicit in defining the gender boundaries is the sport of “artistic,” or regular, gymnastics: both women and men perform floor exercises, but the women perform to music while the men do not. For another discussion of sports, see Clarke 87–96. For the ways in which the film apparatus and the musical genre further “feminize” the dancing male, see Cohan.

12. See Leppert for a discussion of the depiction of drums in European portraiture as symbolic of masculinity and power. The shapes sometimes overtly reference male genitalia.

13. Although obviously the *Sheik* was Arabic, Valentino himself was Italian and his breakthrough role was as an Argentinian gaucho doing the tango in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Rex Ingram, 1921). During this period, “exotic” was an interchangeable “other,” with one “exotic” being substituted unproblematically for another.

14. All this was undoubtedly a subtext to the television executives’ discomfort with the idea of Lucy and Ricky—it smacked just a little of miscegenation, sexual deviance, and deception.

15. The Ricardos’ second Manhattan apartment was built to a similar design, but still quite small.

16. The affinity of this kind of performance with Lucy’s are emphasized by the guest appearance by Harpo Marx, who performs the classic mirror gag with Lucy. For more on The Marx Brothers and the musical number, see Conrich.

17. Drawing on Freud, Mehlman identifies the conflict between the self and the other in the creation of the comic effect. Steve Neale then picks up this idea and amplifies it in an article that itself is a response and amplification of Eaton in “Laughter in the Dark.”

18. Morris’s anecdote about her family’s reception of *I Love Lucy* shows a clear gender bias between identification (Meaghan and her mom) and abjection (her dad) (15–17).

19. The women in Press’s study were divided along class lines: in part because of the extremes of her performance (Lucy’s ineptitude/Lucille Ball’s skill in depicting this), middle-class women identified with Lucy, working-class women rejected her reality. Taken together with Morris’s anecdote [see above note], one may extrapolate that *I Love Lucy* hit its target demographic of suburban, middle-class female consumers.

20. Doty’s analysis of Lucille Ball’s star image, primarily in *I Love Lucy*, betrays a highly ambivalent positioning between admiration of her skill and frustration with her containment, lending his essay a sense of hopelessness that partially refutes Mellencamp’s more optimistic attempts to recuperate Lucy’s excesses from a feminist perspective.

21. This kind of conflict can cause problems of diegetic reality: some critics have found the 1957 film *Marjorie Morningstar* difficult because, despite their self-evident beauty and talent, Gene Kelly and Natalie Wood portray people unable to succeed in show business.

22. Van Dyke starred in *Bye, Bye Birdie* (1963), *Mary Poppins* (1964), and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), and Mary Tyler Moore co-starred with Julie Andrews in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967).

23. For an entertaining and informative cultural history of the Twist see Dawson.

24. Although I agree with Feuer that this is indeed an element of the cultural work done by these late musicals, she must work rather hard to argue this power for this group of musicals specifically—most musicals do it, these are perhaps just better at it.

25. Kelly and Astaire are mentioned fairly often in the show: an equation of Rob with Fred Astaire is one of the key comic points in “The Night the Roof Fell In.” Van Dyke bears a passing similarity to both dancers—he is thin and light like Astaire, but more balletic and athletic like Kelly; he even bears a facial resemblance to both of them. In one instance, Van Dyke almost overdetermines himself as a dancer (“Ray Murdoch’s X-Ray”): in an effort to get Laura to dance, Rob claims he feels like Fred Astaire [*executes the slide from “The Continental”*], Donald O’Connor [*shuffles his feet in a tap flurry*], and Gene Kelly [*performs a balletic leap*], all rolled into one. Laura comments that she’s too tired to dance with any of him—another of the few acknowledgments that housework is work.

26. Smith is a bit of an anomaly, as he had had a hit record previously, which launched the sitcom, but it was the sitcom that was the springboard that took him to unprecedented movie and chart success.

27. A kind of in-between example is *Bewitched* (1964–72), which featured musical numbers only very rarely and late in its run. “Pandora Spocks” performances of rock and roll as Serena in *Bewitched* have some narrative intent—they separate the wild, brunette Serena from domestic, blonde Samantha (both played by Elizabeth Montgomery), and Montgomery appeared to have no pretensions to being a serious musical performer. When songwriters Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart guest starred in an episode, it was very like Chad and Jeremy’s appearance on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* in exploiting the popularity of charting stars, but instead of performing on *The Alan Brady Show* and parodying the Beatles, Boyce and Hart are transported to a witch’s party in the cosmic continuum and it is simply a dislocation joke. It was also a blatant case of cross-promotion, as Don Kirshner’s Col-Gems provided the music for *Bewitched*, and Boyce and Hart were a songwriting team signed to his production team; they were also responsible for a number of *The Monkees*’ hits.

28. *The Dick Van Dyke Show* was even re-inscribed, without music, as *The Jackie Thomas Show* (1992–93), though the star of the series, Tom Arnold (who was, extratextually, widely considered to have gotten the show through the insistence of his then-wife, Roseanne), was cast as the loutish Jackie Thomas/Alan Brady character. Dennis Boutsikaris played head writer Jerry who kept a framed photograph of Dick Van Dyke on his desk.

29. Note that the terminology (voiceover, underscore) holds a kind of power relationship between placement and perception.

30. *Moonlighting* is a clear antecedent for a show like *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002) (see Brown), which also uses some of what Brown calls “playover” technique from *Miami Vice*.

31. I do realize that there is a fine distinction between the musical number as “exterior” to the narrative, as I am arguing for shows like *The Partridge Family*, and the musical number as generic gag, but that is partly a failure of terminology. I have found it impossible to find appropriate gradations, but the difference is that the “exterior” musical performance is one that is set up as a performance for the sheer enjoyment of the performance itself, and the “generic” disruption is a musical number which emerges incongruously from the narrative. It may certainly be enjoyed as a performance, but it also disrupts the narrative as a generic intrusion: no performance is signaled until it intrudes on the narrative (as opposed to the narrative disruption/suspension in *I Love Lucy* or *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, as when they are rehearsing or entertaining one another after dinner).

32. David Marc has proposed that sitcoms like *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–71) perform such a function with their stereotypical characters and static plots, reducing the situation to an antagonism of cultures. Discussed in Feuer, “Genre Study” 149–50.

33. Sitcoms are typically shot on videotape in front of a live audience. While this gives a theatrical immediacy to such shows, it typically does not allow for location shooting expense nor the sophisticated manipulations of the image available on film (for instance, the montages that are a stylistic feature of *The Wonder Years* and many hour-long dramas). Videotape also does not allow for the manipulation of the soundtrack, such as *The Wonder Years*’ voice over narration, non-diegetic sound effects, and the careful integration of those elements with both non-diegetic music and diegetic dialogue and sound, that film can afford.

34. A fair number of dramas have done “musical episodes” in the past decade—*Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Oz*—though the context is very different. In the first two instances, the shows are about magic and fantasy to begin with. In *Oz*, the use of music to critique violent relationships and the criminal justice system has an obvious but powerfully ironic effect. I think what made this acceptable in a way that *Cop Rock* was not is that the show’s theatrical structure, with a Shakespearean on-screen omniscient narrator, already lends itself to the inclusion of musical numbers generically. We should also not underestimate the fact that *Oz* is an HBO show, and therefore not under the same commercial pressure of attracting a broad audience as a network show.

35. This is part of a larger pattern of references to old sitcoms scattered throughout the show—for instance Dr. Cox’s sarcastic names for JD include “Laverne,” “Shirley,” and “Joanie,” referring to the Happy Days world.

36. Most of these referents themselves are exceptionally campy, particularly Eurovision and *Batman*.

37. Anthropologist Victor Turner would call this a progression from the “liminal” to the “liminoid,” from a truly transformative cultural experience to the representation of one in, usually, a commodified form. “One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid” (55).