



**One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount: Popular Music on Early Television.** By Murray Forman. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. 405 pp. ISBN: 9780822350118.

In 2006, Keith Negus concluded his excellent article on music and television with the following observation: “Histories of twentieth-century music have, in general, tended to ignore television. ... Equally, studies of television have often devoted little attention to music” (pp. 329–330). However true this may have been, the view from 2014 is different. Music-television scholarship is booming (e.g., Ingils, 2010; Klein, 2010; Deaville, 2011; Birdsall & Enns, 2012; Greene, 2012; Rodman, 2012; Delmont & Forman, 2013). And within this work, Murray Forman’s thorough investigation into popular music on early television is exemplary and distinctive. Whereas existing literature on music and television tends to focus on music videos (at least in popular music studies) or the Elvis-and-after era (at least in screen studies), Forman confronts the period that made those phenomena possible in the first place: television’s formative years, *circa* 1948–1955.

Sandwiched between a short introduction that contains a brief but authoritative literature review, and a short conclusion that sprints through Elvis, MTV, *American Idol*, YouTube, and *Guitar Hero*, are six hefty chapters that examine the period before television was television, before it had definite “presentational norms.” These chapters show how popular music informed the creation of the medium. In the first four (which amount to over 200 pages of richly illustrated arguments), Forman outlines the aesthetic, technical, institutional, and cultural conjunctures that defined the relationship between television and music. He portrays a kind of dialectic in which television was shaped through music and music was (re)shaped for television.

Chapter 1 actually begins in the 1930s, before commercial television broadcasting had taken off in the U.S. Forman shows that popular music was there at the predawn of television, as executives confronted the most basic questions about how the new medium would look and sound. Also in Chapter 1—which contains a detailed discussion of the American Federation of Musicians’ reaction to TV—and spilling over into Chapter 2—which contains a broader discussion of numerous musicians, groups, and TV shows—Forman draws out the ways that the emerging relationship between popular music and television was marked by both anxiety and excitement. One of the main issues here is how popular music, as its own unionized labour sector, addressed the new work opportunities provided by the need for live musicians and bands on TV.

Although the marriage of popular music and television was marked by continued uncertainties and controversies, certain musical and visual norms nevertheless emerged as television broadcasting proliferated after 1948. The result, as Forman shows in Chapter 3, was a set of aesthetic settlements and genre conventions in musical programming. In Chapter 4, Forman outlines ways in which the desire to establish these newly defined genres as distinctively televisual experiences led to a “crisis of musical integrity” (p. 214). Musicians had to choose whether to give in to the (lucrative) allure of television, which often involved exaggerated “onscreen shtick” and “funny hat rou-

tines,” or to resist it in the name of saving face. In this way, television participated in the debates about “authenticity” that define most popular music cultures.

The final two chapters address televisual and musical representations of race. In Chapter 5, Forman outlines a complex history in which black actors were generally underrepresented and disrespectfully portrayed, yet black musicians “were held to slightly different standards of representational responsibility. ... In the case of televised music, black artistry was actively sought and, for the most part, presented respectfully to television audiences” (p. 233). Chapter 6 studies Latino and Hispanic musicians. Here Forman makes connections with both the mid-century mainstreaming of Latin music (especially “mambo-mania”) and the emerging global televisual imagination, in which “Latino musicians were especially valued by TV producers for their verve and their unique *difference*” (p. 276; emphasis in original). Taken together, these chapters show how the medium was an important site for the negotiation of racial politics. Televised musical performances, in ways neither identical nor reducible to other kinds of televised performance, posed significant (if not in themselves revolutionary) challenges to prevailing racial and ethnic ideologies.

Each of these chapters is researched in extreme depth and illustrated in exquisite detail. At the same time, the book may frustrate scholars wanting to pursue future projects on music and television, for many of Forman’s examples and anecdotes are thickly described but thinly referenced. Big arguments sometimes cite few sources. To be clear, it is always obvious that Forman has done the work; he just doesn’t always show it. Additionally, for a book that is so obviously based on meticulous long-term research, the lack of methodological reflection is surprising. Indeed, Forman’s only mention of *how* he viewed all this early television—a mixture of archival visits and YouTube viewing—comes on page 335 of 339. He does consider his own viewing biography. However, the reflexive discussion of his subject position lacked the import that might have come from a detailed discussion of the scope and character of his archive. I don’t know if pruning the usual scholarly apparatus and axing methodological reflection were Forman’s choices, or if they were editorial decisions at Duke, perhaps with the aim of reaching a more general readership. Either way, the book occasionally seems to want to serve too many masters: sometimes too scholarly for the casual reader, sometimes too casual for the interested scholar.

Overall, though, the sheer amount of rich, new research in this book makes it more than worthwhile. That it is presented in a way that is engaging and often entertaining is a bonus. Forman opens new windows onto mid-century media and musical cultures. He shows us—aesthetically, culturally, institutionally—how the relationship between music and television took shape. Unquestionably, *One Night on TV is Worth Weeks at the Paramount: Popular Music on Early Television* will be a go-to resource for all students and scholars in the growing study of music and television. It will also interest those in communications studies who take seriously the cultural negotiations of media systems and aesthetic formations.

## References

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