

Roxbury sketch. Not exactly the sketch I had in mind, I just hoped she'd made quite the splash on *American Bandstand*.

As a cast member, when you finally arrived home Wednesday night, there would be a phone message on your answering machine from Hillary Selesnick, the coordinating producer, giving you your call time for the following day. For a sketch's first-ever rehearsal, each cast member got an individual call time for a forty-minute camera blocking. I wasn't due in until late afternoon that Thursday, but I came in around twelve so I could see Soundgarden's sound check for the songs "Pretty Noose" and "Burden in My Hand." Coincidentally, the band's bassist, Ben Shepherd, had been a year ahead of me in high school back on Bainbridge Island, Washington, where Mom and Marc moved us during my freshman year. Nearly every day after school, while I was on Bainbridge getting involved in theater, Ben took the ferry over to Seattle to hang out at the center of the growing grunge music scene. Seeing Ben on the *SNL* set was my first experience running into someone from my hometown who had found a similar type of success after graduating. After sharing a cathartic "Fuck, yeah, we made it!" I headed to my dressing room and waited for the phone to ring, requesting me to report to the writers' room on nine for rewrites on "Roxbury."

On Friday, I had a 2 PM call time to film the pre-tapes, two floors down in Studio 6H, the stage where *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* was located. In just two hours, that audience would be filing in. But first I had to go to Tom Broecker in wardrobe, then over to the hair and makeup department to gel my hair back and put on sideburns with "sticky gum." When I got to 6H, there on the *Conan* set sat an engineless car, positioned in front of a green screen facing two cameras, along with Will and Jim,

lighting, the B-camera director, and the rest of the crew, including the infamous “Wally” on cue cards. (Yes, that is the same Wally you see holding cue cards on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*.) We hadn’t decided where we’d be sitting; Jim went for the back seat so he could be center frame. Will, unselfish as usual, muttered, “I guess I’ll be the driver,” leaving the passenger seat to me, which meant I’d get to do the “something’s wrong with the CD” joke. Someone yelled “Play back!” signaling for the music to begin; the director shouted “Action!” and the three of us started bopping.

(The CD joke, by the way, went like this: We are bopping away, when the music suddenly stops. Jim hollers, “What the hell is going on?!” and I eject the CD and hand it to him to inspect. Jim yells, “Dust!” then blows on the CD. He hands it back, I put it back in the player, and then the music starts playing again and we resume head bopping. Trust me, it was a good joke. Will and I thought of the CD-stopping bit, but Jim came up with the dust part while on set.)

There were three pre-tapes to film, and we only had enough time to do a few takes for each one. The shots each had to be set up and lit, and interior lighting in a car is a pain. There were two short linear fluorescent lights above each of us, makeshiftly (Is that word? It is for the moment.) duct taped to our window visors, and one more behind, on the floor by Jim’s feet. We had to be adjusted so that Will’s and my bopping wouldn’t block Jim’s bopping behind us.

The last pre-tape was the final joke of the sketch, and the hopeful payoff—it’s our ride back for the night, Jim in the back seat with his conquest from the nursing home seated on his lap. In the script, it was written that Jim would make out with his conquest, but just before the second take, he asked Props if they could get him some dentures, and then proceeded to pretend that he and his elderly lady friend had been necking so

fiercely that he'd sucked her choppers right out of her mouth. He held the dentures between us toward the camera, exhilarated and announcing, "Look! A souvenir!"

(After filming, in a yellow cab going home, I wondered if the joke might be too broad for *SNL*, more suited to *In Living Color*. Of course, Jim's instincts were right on. What I really should have been wondering was why I was questioning Jim fuckin' Carrey.)

On Saturday, we rehearsed a complete run-through of every sketch—with pre-tapes, voice-overs, props, wigs, and wardrobe—from noon to 5 PM. The cast was never expected to perform in this run-through at the level we'd need for dress rehearsal, which was where we would finally see what jokes did and didn't work for the studio audience—the week he'd guest hosted, Phil Hartman had taken me aside on Saturday and recommended I "save my energy" in the eight-o'clock dress rehearsal for the live show. Some sketches are cut after the dress rehearsal, and I remember thinking, "How can he be so sure that his sketch will make it in?" And "How can he be so sure *I* could be so sure that my sketch would make it in?" At 5 PM, we broke for "lunch" and then were free to prepare, relax, or nap until exactly 8 PM, when the approximately two-hour non-telecast dress rehearsal with an in-studio audience began.

At last, sometime between 10:40 and 11:10 PM, everybody would scurry over from their dressing rooms or the ninth-floor writers' room or wherever and squeeze into Lorne's main office. Similar to the Monday pitch meeting, everyone would sit wherever they could find a place—the couches, floor—but this time we were there to see the final rundown of the 11:30 live show and to hear Lorne's notes on each sketch that was now on the board, from the cold opening to "Goodnights." The show was an hour and a half, and each thirty-minute block would have to be cut

down to about twenty-two minutes of sketch material to make room for commercial breaks. If your sketch didn't play well in the dress rehearsal, it would mostly likely be cut and wouldn't get a second chance. Ever. If your sketch played great, but for some reason it still got cut, you had to let it go without an argument or even a question. There was nothing you could do about it. It was about the show. Not you.

Five minutes before the show went live that week, my dad's friend Kathleen walked into my dressing room and plopped all her stuff down. She was out of breath, probably from running from the elevator to get there. Instead of being with the rest of the extras, she was decidedly set on sharing my spacious fifteen-square-foot dressing room for the rest of the night. *Thanks, Dad!*

During the show, I was being pulled from set to set so quickly by the assistant director that it was nearly impossible to gauge how the sketch was doing with the audience. But ten minutes after we'd finished, just after getting out of my costume, the stage intercom blared: "Jim, Will, Kattan! Please set yourselves for Soundgarden song intro immediately!" And so I hurriedly pulled the two-piece sharkskin suit back off its hanger, ripped the gold chain out of a ziplocked sandwich bag marked "Kattan" from Props, and somehow successfully threw everything back on. Then, being the little half-Jewish desert twister that I am, I darted like the wind to meet Will and Jim at the "Goodnights" stage. This was definitely new. The guest host always introduced the band alone. This was the first time they ever had the characters from a sketch join the host to introduce the musical guest—and these characters had only been introduced a few minutes before! This was the first hint that our sketch might be a success.

The show's after-party took place down on Rockefeller Center's ice rink—sans ice, since it was summer. This was the season finale, and it was

by far the biggest *SNL* after-party I had seen, the biggest party I'd been to so far and, with the exception of the fortieth anniversary, it remains the biggest *SNL* party I have ever been to. I remember struggling to get through the crowd that night to congratulate Jim, but it was impossible to reach him. This was his prime, and the excitement around him was remarkable; everyone was vying for his attention—in fact, it had been hard to connect with him the whole week. He had this amazing energy and was a blast to be around, but it was almost as if his feet weren't on the ground.

That night, I never would have guessed how that four-minute sketch would end up changing my life. Today, more than twenty years later, it is popular enough that YouTube has a ten-hour-long loop of the three of us in that car, heads bobbing to Haddaway, *with over twenty-two million views*.

Even though I'd found some immediate success with my sketches during that first half season on the show, I didn't feel stable enough to exhale. Like I said before, I wasn't nervous, but I wasn't necessarily optimistic, either. Lorne was obviously helping out when it came to airtime, but I still didn't feel like I'd made a decent connection with him. Every interaction I'd had with Lorne had been somewhere on the spectrum between a glance as he walked by me in the hallway and a single three-syllable sentence. I took some comfort in the fact that when I mentioned this to others, pretty much everyone reacted the same way: "That's just Lorne," they'd say, holding their forearms out and palms up in an elaborate shrug or rolling their eyes. It wasn't until twelve years later that head writer Steve Higgins told me something that explained almost every bizarre dynamic I experienced that first half season. Steve said the reason I was hired for the last six weeks of the season was to "light a fire under everybody." (Maybe that's why Norm Macdonald was always such a sweetheart to me . . .)