An Open Letter to the Networks from Live TV Musicians

Dana Walden, Disney/ABC Television  
Mark Lazarus, NBC Universal TV & Streaming  
George Cheeks, CBS Entertainment Group  
Bob Bakish, Viacom CBS

“Since we live in an age in which silence is not only criminal but suicidal,  
I have been making as much noise as I can...” —James Baldwin

After years of attempts to achieve balance and fairness in the industry of broadcast television, we—the musicians performing on live television—write to you—the networks—to agree to create economic parity with our actor, writer, and director colleagues in residual payments on streaming platforms, health care contributions, and wages.

This month your companies acknowledged that live television musicians are the only sector of the industry exhibiting substantial racial diversity, but at the bargaining table we are told that our contributions are worth less than those of actors, writers, and directors, even though we give just as much. You cannot ignore that the other guilds are predominately white and are compensated at a higher rate with residual payments for streamed content, health care, and wages.

We are aware of how consumer-based enterprises value diversity, equity and inclusion. A cultural shift is happening across the globe and consumers are watching and listening. Your networks’ shows use Black music and BIPOC people for humor, healing, and processing emotional content. The clips in these shows, made possible by us and in which we appear, generate millions of views and tens of millions of dollars in advertising revenue for your networks on streaming platforms like Peacock, CBS All Access, and Disney+, and yet we must continually beg for what the other guilds already receive.

Historically our union (AFM) has been more inclusive of BIPOC members than the other unions inside of the Live TV industry. Unfortunately, this goes hand-in-hand with its members being economically disrespected, undervalued and underpaid in comparison to those of other unions. Systemic racism becomes the status quo regardless of intention or awareness, but now you have the opportunity to rewrite this narrative.

You have yet to show a willingness to reach a meaningful agreement with the most diverse workforce in the entertainment industry: live television musicians. Now is the time to fix this problem by no longer taking advantage of us and offering economic parity with our creative colleagues.

We demand fair wages, fair health coverage, and equal residuals for work used on streaming platforms.

By addressing these demands you will demonstrate to us a commitment to value all working musicians and you will demonstrate to the world a powerful example of action toward dismantling systemic racism.

#RespectUs  

September 16, 2020
Open Letter to the Networks Signed by:

Jessica Arellano
Woodwinds, Dancing with the Stars

Jeff Babko
Musician, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Jon Batiste
Bandleader, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Hagar Ben Ari
Bass, The Late Late Show with James Corden

Ron Blake
Baritone Saxophone & Flute, Saturday Night Live

Guillermo E. Brown
Drums, The Late Late Show with James Corden

Eli Brueggemann
Music Director, Saturday Night Live

Syd Butler
Bass, Late Night with Seth Meyers

Louis Cato
Multi-instrumentalist, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Eric Daniels
Digital Keyboards / Sound Design, The Voice

Justin Derrico
Guitarist, The Voice

Kirk Douglas
Guitarist, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Jonathan Dresel
Drums, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Jimmy Earl
Bass, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Stro Elliot (Brian Elliot Roberson)
Percussion, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Cleto Escobedo Jr.
Saxophone, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Cleto Escobedo III
Saxophone/Singer, Music Director, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Louis Fouché
Saxophonist, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Alex Foster
Alto Sax, Soprano Sax, Clarinet, Flute, Piccolo, Saturday Night Live

Kamal Gray
Keyboardist, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Javier Antonio Gonzalez
1st Trumpet, Dancing with the Stars

Dave Guy
Trumpet, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Ian Hendrickson-Smith
Saxophone, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Mark Kelley
Bass, Keyboard, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Jon Kubis
Keyboards, Guitar, Orchestration, Programming & Production, Dancing with the Stars, Ray Chew Live

Jon Lampley
Trumpet/Tuba/Vocals, Stay Human, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Paul Mirkovich, Musical Director
The Voice, Rockstar, Comic Strip Live, and various awards shows and specials ABC and all the other networks, since 1986.

Endea Owens
Bassist, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

J Shawn Pelton
Drums, Saturday Night Live

James Poyser
Keyboards, The Roots, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon

Steve Scalfati
Keyboard, Music Production, The Late Late Show with James Corden

Marnie Stern
Guitarist, Late Night with Seth Meyers

Artie Reynolds III
Bass, Dancing with the Stars

Maddie Rice
Guitar, Saturday Night Live

Nêgah Santos
Percussionist, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Joe Saylor
Drummer, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert

Garrett Smith
Trombone, Dancing with the Stars

Toshi Yanagi
Guitarist, Cleto & the Cletones, Jimmy Kimmel Live!

Tim Young
Guitar, The Late Late Show with James Corden