

# Carson Is Totally The Bestest Talkshow Host Ever!!!

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Last Call with Carson Daly is exactly what its name implies--a final swig of predictable jokes and vapid celebrity interviews before late-night television junkies hit the sack. But anyone who has better things to do on Friday night can still see the show, as it gets filmed at NBC studios during weekday afternoons.

Some came for the comedy, some came for the music, and others, most understandably, came for the dancers. But no one, it seems, came for Carson himself.

"Yeah, that's a bonus," was all Janis Messenger, a fan in her 20s, had to say about the opportunity to see Daly in person. She and her mother traveled from Hartford, Conn., when they heard that Nelly Furtado would be performing on the show.

"Carson who?" her mother asked.

Eventually, the line started moving--downstairs, underneath an archway, and into another corridor. Time to wait some more. The walls were lined with autographed celebrity photographs, so patrons could mull over everyone they would rather be seeing. The long wait was eased by Josh, an intern who could dictate the entire history of NBC studios in under a minute. Finally, the doors opened.

Many audience members had never been in a television studio before. Others, such as Nicole Roche, a high school senior who skipped school in Pennsbury, Penn. to see the show, consider it their personal stomping ground. Roche said she has been to a dozen shootings and seen "millions" of celebrities, including Heather Graham and Edward Norton. She dreams of one day attending The David Letterman Show.

In the world of studio audiences, there is a developed hierarchy. Shows such as Saturday Night Live are tough to get into, while Rosie O'Donnell and Carson Daly are almost begging for fans--the Last Call web site mentions, "Tickets are free, so you should definitely come by." Oprah's show might take the cake--rumor has it that the lucky fans who get into her studio walk out with gifts and \$100 bills in hand.

Inside the studio, a pair of screens played Daly's "greatest hits" while workers paced back and forth across a stage that was much smaller than it seems on television. A manager wearing a black hat and headphones stood up in front of the crowd to give the introductory disclaimer: turn off your cell phones, and applaud loudly. He asked the crowd to practice, and suddenly unleashed the Beatle-mania fan in everyone. Then Daly strolled in.

The myth of the television studio is that fans get to see celebrities for who they genuinely are, but really the studio is just as much a façade as the program itself. In fact, when Daly cut to commercial breaks the band didn't stop playing and the stick-thin dancers, who aren't allowed off their pedestals for the entire taping, didn't stop dancing. Those who came to see the sordid underbelly of late night television got a watered-down version of the show instead. Somehow, everyone was still enthralled.

The employees themselves confess to the banality of the studio. When asked about the most interesting thing that had happened during her year on Last Call, one dancer replied, "Sometimes the power goes out."

And woe to any fan looking for something more--security guards reprimanded one young man for

poking around the studio after hours. "That's a bad idea," one guard said, "unless you like pain."

There were, however, a few gossip-worthy moments. When an audience member asked who owned the stray shoe that was lying on the stage, Daly replied, "just some tramp." Similarly, Daly's warmhearted rapport with his celebrity guests vanished the instant the cameras stopped rolling. During one commercial break, Drea De Mateo, the lithe and lovely actress from *The Sopranos*, waited silently while Daly glumly contemplated his cue cards. When the signal came, it was back to making allusions to Mateo's personal life as if she and Daly had been high school friends.

Friday's show will feature an array of skits and jokes that were all unfortunate when viewed live. "That was just weird," one audience member said of Daly's attempt to cure a chicken of Asian Bird Flu by feeding it aspirin. The stereotypical "Asian doctor" who assisted Daly was likewise more disturbing than comic.

But everything was redeemed at the close of the show, when the audience moved to a second stage to watch Nelly Furtado perform. She was perhaps the nicest person in the room, taking time to chat with nearby fans and smile her way through several minutes of mechanical problems. By ignoring the sparse crowd and the cameramen standing in the shadows, one might have lost track of context, if just for a moment, and thought that it was all very real.