

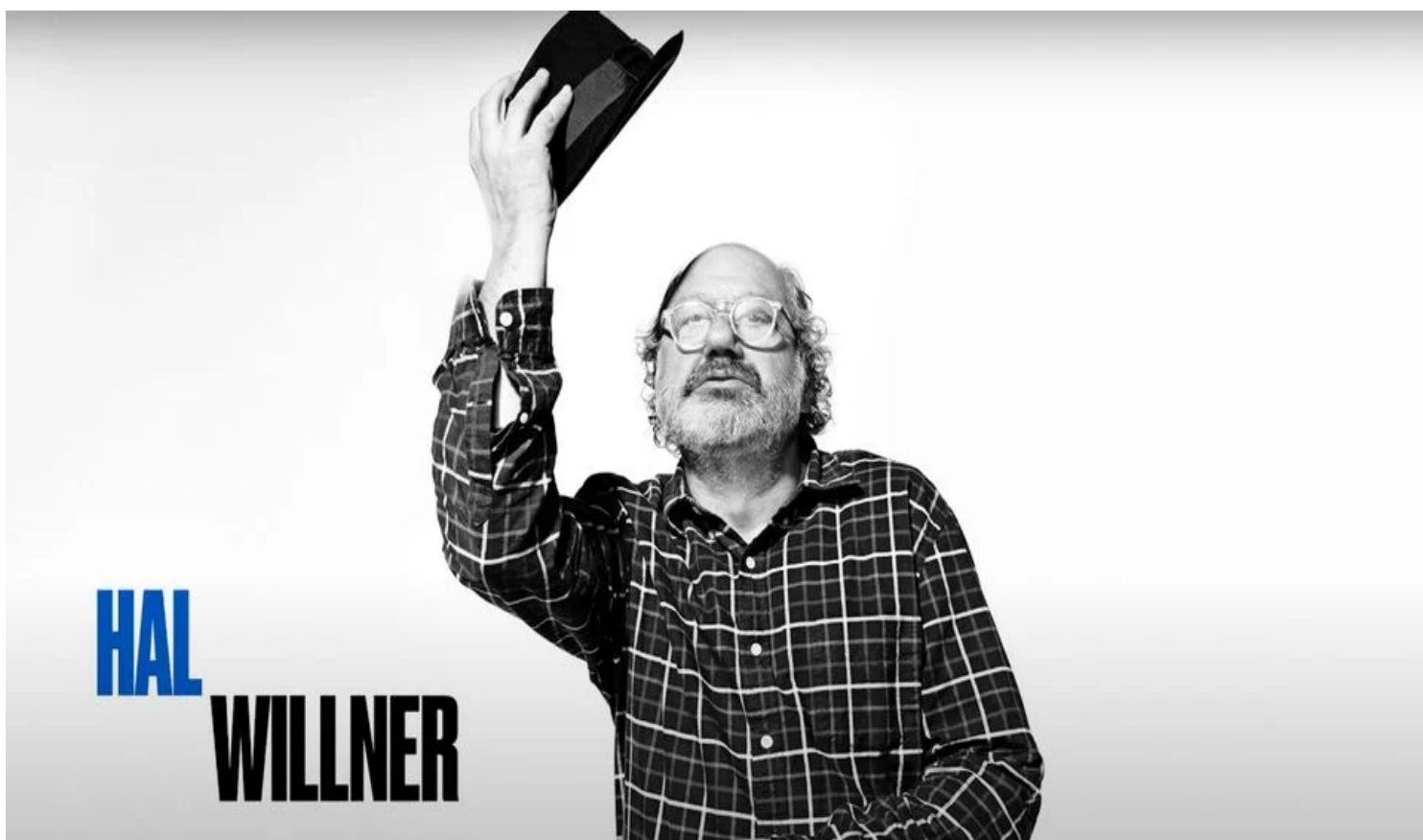
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## SNL: John Mulaney's Hal T-Shirt Explained

John Mulaney pays tribute to a Saturday Night Live legend. Here's what you need to know about the late music supervisor Hal Willner and his legacy.

BY Q.V. HOUGH

1 DAY AGO



John Mulaney pays tribute to a [Saturday Night Live](#) legend. On Halloween 2020, the American comedian hosted the fifth episode of season 46, and wore a t-shirt labeled "HAL" during the final send-off. Whereas HAL in all caps is often associated with a character from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Mulaney's tip of the cap was for the late Hal Willner, a [Saturday Night Live](#) colleague and friend.

*Saturday Night Live* always has a different comedic vibe when Mulaney headlines the NBC

sketch comedy series. Formerly a staff writer from 2008 to 2012, the comic has now hosted four times and typically contributes to surrealistic sketches that are slightly longer than the usual bits. "Bodega Bathroom" became one of *Saturday Night Live's* season 44's most popular sketches, due its absurdist humor and Broadway spin, and a new sketch entitled "New York Musical" is similarly grounded in theatrical themes.

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In the closing moments of the Halloween 2020 episode, Mulaney acknowledges the legacy of the aforementioned Willner — a long-time *Saturday Night Live* music supervisor. Willner passed away from COVID-19 complications in April 2020. The *Saturday Night Live* veteran had acknowledged his illness just days before on social media, and then died on April 7 — just one day after his 64th birthday. *Saturday Night Live* aired a four-minute tribute to Willner during their April 11 show, which includes appearances from numerous cast members and alumni. Kate McKinnon recalls Willner's quick turnarounds and a knack for selecting "cinematic" compositions, while Mulaney remembers *Saturday Night Live's* musical guru as a

"wonderful friend." The original Willner tribute is scored to Lou Reed's 1972 single "Perfect Day."

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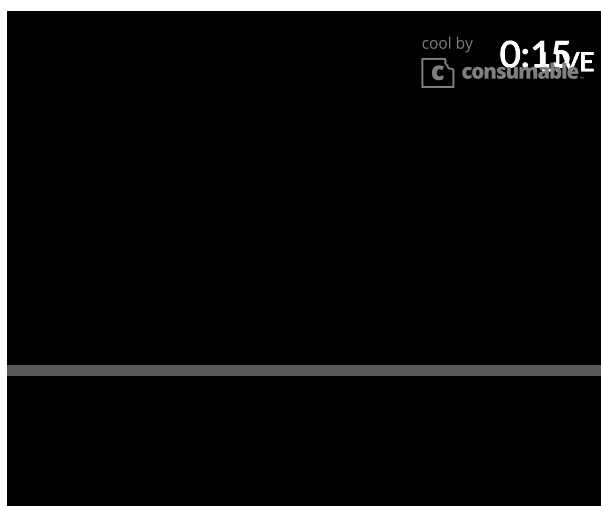
Saturday Night Live hired Willner in 1980. One year later, he produced the album *Amarcord Nino Rota*; a cinematic tribute to the focal Italian movie composer. During the aforementioned tribute video to Willner, various cast members discuss how much they

appreciated talking music with their colleague, whose career work displays his eclectic taste and love for various genres. Most recently, Willner produced the 2020 album *AngelHeaded Hipster: The Songs of Marc Bolan & T. Rex*, which released posthumously in September 2020. According to actor Tim Robbins (via [The New York Times](#)), Willner once reached out during an especially difficult time:

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*“He curated a trip for me at a time I needed it... We went to Lisbon to see Leonard Cohen, then to another part of Portugal to see Lou Reed, and then to Prague to see Tom Waits. He dreams of creating something that hasn’t been seen before.”*

Willner was married to Sheila Rogers, a producer for *The Late Late Show With James Corden*. The couple lived together in Manhattan with their 15-year-old son, Arlo. During the

**Saturday Night Live** tribute video, Willner himself appears at the end and explains his musical process:

*"When it's all working... there's nothing like it. I mean, I kind of get off on the danger."*