

Tcom 4897, Seminar in Telecommunications  
Fall 2017; T&Th 10AM-12PM; Beeghly #2324\*  
\* Also Bliss 2019

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Bliss #2010; 8:30-9:30, M-F  
742-1855 (YSU); 792-5557(Home)

## “Audio Drama: Theater of the Mind”

**Description:** We aim to create two complete cycles of audio theater production and performance. All students will fulfill a production role (Technical Director, Show Director, Producer, Foley, Music Director) and a performance role. Open casting, with preference given to seminar participants and YSU students/faculty/staff. Focus on how to coach vocal performance, how to manage production projects, how to add theatricality to events, how to use “things” to create worlds in sound. Close study of how good scripts work in production, with an eye toward replication of their virtues. Screening of selected radio drama productions. We aim to travel one production to an off-campus site.

**Format and Technology:** Live performance is at the top of the production food chain. Like in making music CDs and TV broadcasts, experts believe excellent shows “recorded live” are better than productions that are somehow repaired in “post.” Anybody can edit some video clips together to make a “program” (consider how “wedding videographers” do just that!), but very few are able to do the editing live, in real time. “Live-to-tape” is down one notch because, although performed and edited in real time, repeat performances/recordings are possible.

We will concentrate on live performance, and maybe some live-to-tape, thereby developing production skills which can’t be called upon in the “post-production” format.

Okay, okay, so “live” isn’t everything. Yes, some productions can’t be done live because some sounds simply can’t be brought into the performance hall – an airplane comes to mind. And, some productions are too complex to do live. But “live before an in-house audience” does really tend to separate experts from cranks.

**Text:** None to buy. Materials will be distributed at no cost to you by email and the web. Expect to cover out-of-pocket expenses for printing, sound effects, etc.

**Assignments:** There will be several different types of assignments, each designed to build your knowledge or to help you develop skill in one or more aspects of dramatic performance and production. Keep in mind that it’s possible to produce a satisfactory 15-minute dramatic production live-to-tape with as little as two hours of rehearsal.

Specific projects will include:

- Study “Audio Drama Production Handbook,” a pdf.
- Study various how-to documents, also pdf’s.
- Participate in several in-class exercises designed to highlight specific production problems.

- Listen to several audio drama productions to ascertain common methods of handling production elements such as exposition, time passage, sound effects, etc.
- Scavenge. You will be asked to find items which can be used to make sound effects, and/or to search out recorded music of one kind or another.
- Write and produce one short script in dramatic form
  - a. Given: a list of sound effects and a radio advertiser. Challenge: write and produce a commercial (:30 or :60) using the effects.
  - b. Given: a summary of a dramatic event in our community's history. Challenge: write and produce a corresponding audio drama.
- Hold significant leadership and performance responsibility for two longform productions. "Doubling" within the seminar will be necessary.

**Grading:** Normally, 90-100 = A; 80-89=B, etc. Because the creation of productions can't be assessed directly through measurement or counting, professional judgement will be used. Grades on projects will reflect an assessment of your individual contribution, of the production ensemble's cohesiveness and effectiveness, and of the merit of your ensemble's output. There might be one quiz/exam covering your knowledge of reading assignments.

To receive an acceptably high grade in this seminar, a person must (1) be "in the moment," fully engaged with the topic and discussion of the moment, (2) make significant contributions to production projects, (2) establish himself/herself as a person who can be counted on to follow through on assignments while always employing high standards, and (3) demonstrate a willingness to adjust personal schedules for team meetings, rehearsals, and other activities.

**Bad Weather:** If Ursuline or Rayen close due to bad weather, we will not meet formally. Use the opportunity to work on your parts in the productions. There is some danger here, though, because time lost to bad weather might not be accounted for in the production schedule.

**Materials Fee:** If one is charged, it will be used to buy and maintain production equipment used in audio theater or to cover some other similar YSU need.

**The Kits:** We own one complete Live Audio Drama production kit, stored in Bliss "TBA." We also can use audio labs and the TV studio audio facilities for sub-productions. Assume that it takes 15 minutes to set up the kit and 10 minutes to strike and store it. That leaves little time of a regular class session for actual practice. If we have 4 production teams working concurrently, then each team will have access to the kit for only **a few minutes** per week during regular class time. Not nearly enough. Clearly, each team will have to work up a schedule to use the audio equipment during non-class hours. You can easily see that "Facilities Time" is precious and limited !!

**The Teams:** On or about September 19<sup>th</sup> we will form 4 production teams, each comprising 5 people. Each team will create an entire Audio Drama production/performance during a week late in the term.

**Big Production:** We shall try to create an evening of Audio Drama in collaboration with students and faculty of the Department of Theater and Dance. We have verified the collaboration of the Mahoning Historical Society and its public performance space in the Tyler Historical Center, downtown. This could be a complete, fully-marketed evening of dinner theater, with tickets sold to the public.

**Drop Date:** The last date to drop with a “W” is sometime near October 28<sup>th</sup>. We are at risk prior to that because team members we believe can be relied on might actually vaporize on that date. Of course, sometimes people who expect to drop in the future start acting as though they have already dropped. It is in your interest to plan your projects by asking, “what would we do if this person were to vanish on October 28<sup>th</sup>?” Then make arrangements accordingly.

**Rely on Others:** Actually, this whole idea of relying on people is at the heart of the seminar. You must rely on your team members in order to pull off a production-performance. That means you must expose yourself to the idiosyncracies of others – who might have agendas that are different than yours. So even from the first week of the term, people you might eventually be teamed up with might not try very hard to learn what’s going on, and they might then be lost later when you need them. Or, during your first production you might have some people who just aren’t very motivated. Actually, even after the drop date you might have a person or two who says, “Hey, look. I’m really getting killed in my other classes, and my job, and I can’t meet with the team.” All this spells trouble for you. Be careful. And remember, Audio Production – done live – is ensemble.

**And more “others”:** Naturally you will cast your presentations using people who are not enrolled in the seminar. (Not only is that okay, it’s good!) These people who agree to lend their creative efforts are making a commitment of time and energy to you and your team. But there’s no legal contract binding them to their word. If they drop out, or don’t show up, or otherwise mess up, you can’t take their firstborn children. You must be relentless in reminding them of how important their contribution is, and relentless in seeking their assurances that you’re safe in relying on them. Of course, they need to know the specifics of the commitment when they make it: exactly what will be expected of them and when. Be sure the production schedule is given to everyone at auditions.

**E-mail:** Good communication among us will be vital. You know the drill at YSU: people come to campus for class, and then many of them go to work or home. Not what we’d find at a “residency college” where everyone lives on campus. This centrifugal force is powerful, but it can be overcome if we’re careful about communication.

Be sure to get a screen name (alias) that reveals your legal name. I get vast amounts of email and I have to be careful about infected documents. My policy is to delete unread any email that shows up from an unidentified source or with a vague or ambiguous subject line. In other words, I don't read email from HOTSTUFF@AOL, BIGDOG69@YAHOO, and the like.

**Web:** Lots of materials are available for you on the web. We will create a site during August and September.

**Community:** Writers from around the world have expressed interest in submitting their work for our review and possible use. To include their materials will be a priority. You will be able to communicate with them directly via the internet – quite an opportunity.

We also will make the term production something of a community event. We'll want to promote auditions widely, including the Youngstown Playhouse, the Oakland and perhaps high schools (depending on the scripts). We can invite community people to help do technical, Foley and music, too. And, of course, you'll need to launch a publicity/promotional campaign that will "fill the house." You'll learn how during the term.