

Tcom 4897, Seminar in Telecommunications
Spring 2020; M&W 3 - 4:15
* Also Bliss 2019

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

“Audio Drama: Night of the Zombie Raccoon”

Caveat: Because two students have enrolled in this seminar, we will use class time in an atypical way. Specifically, we will not meet regularly for lecture/discussion, nor will we undertake normal seminar research projects and research presentations. Rather, we will focus our efforts on the production of “Night of the Zombie Raccoons,” a Good Humor Radio Hour presentation scheduled for March 30 and April 1 at the Youngstown Playhouse.

You, the two students enrolled, will occupy a catbird seat in this project. As of this date (December 23) we have achieved the following:

1. Script treatment written
2. Principal performers: Roger Gregg, Robert Joki, Phil Proctor, Melinda Peterson
3. Rehearsal spaces reserved
4. Performances booked at Youngstown Playhouse
5. One-man show, River of Ghosts, booked for Spotlight Theater

Here are some critical steps yet to be taken:

1. Schedule, promote and host auditions
2. Create audio mixing team
3. Create musical performing team
4. Create sound effects team and collect sound effects
5. Create publicity program for events
6. Create audience promotion
7. Etc.

We will do – and students will be assigned responsibility for – the activities which the production requires. So students will acquire knowledge and skill in all the dimensions of audio drama production and performance. This will be a large and demanding project, and we must stay ahead of it. Everyone who is in for a penny is in for a pound. (We will be using internationally - known talent!) Seminar participants may audition for “chorus” performance roles, providing a chance to work closely with invited talent.

Because “star” performers will come to town 3 days before curtain, expect little wiggle room for errors. We will need to have our “A-Game” on.

Description: Seminar students should focus on how directors coach vocal performers, 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.

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, 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 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. But our Good Humor live show will not be anything like this – not like a 2-hour fluff.

Specific projects will include:

- Review “Audio Drama Production Handbook,” a pdf.
- Review various how-to documents, also pdf's.
- 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.
- Hold significant leadership and performance responsibilities for Night of the Zombie Raccoons.

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.

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." You can easily see that "Facilities Time" is precious and limited !!

Drop Date: The last date to drop with a "W" is sometime near February 14th. 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 assignments by asking, "what would we do if this person were to vanish on February 14th?" Then make arrangements accordingly.

Rely on Others: Actually, this whole idea of relying on people is at the heart of the seminar. We must rely on 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 we'll cast 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.