

# **THE WELL-TEMPERED AUDIO DRAMATIST**

**A Guide to the Production of Audio Plays**  
**in Twenty-First Century America**

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**The National Audio Theater Festivals, Inc.**  
**Hamstead, NY**

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*to*  
*Michelle M. Faith*  
*without whom I'd have had no career*  
*and far less aggravation*



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# Introduction

Early in June, 2006, I received the following letter:

*Dear Norman:*

*The enclosed tome is being published by the National Audio Theater Festivals for those misguided beginners who want to pursue an iffy career in audio drama. I wrote it hoping to provide a service to the profession that you and I have toiled at longer than any other living souls in the U.S. of A. People can download it free from the Internet or buy this print version. All proceeds go to the NATF. Can you be persuaded to write an introduction? It can be as long or as short as you wish. Say whatever you think you should about this book, me and/or radio plays.*

It is signed, *El Fiendo*.

For reasons best known to himself, Rasovsky occasionally alludes to himself jokingly as fiendish, and at one point he implies that as a radio director he's a despot. The facts are that he is as tranquil and citizenly a director as you will find in the arts, and nothing like a taskmaster schooled in darkness. He has a positive genius for conceiving and executing scholarly projects of immense scope and profound seriousness. Examples — an extended series on Homer's *Odyssey* and sequences of even greater length on the French Revolution. Enterprises of this sort require staggering logistics, both structural and intellectual, and El Fiendo does not shirk from either.

This time Rasovsky is backed by the National Audio Theater Festivals, Inc. and their goal is "a guide to the production of audio plays in twenty-first century America." It is not without built-in cavils, the main one being that America has let down radio drama, a medium that it once dominated throughout the world. Rasovsky doesn't mention, so I will, the fact that radio drama is not even reviewed these days. *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* no longer fill their pages with radio reviews; neither does the daily press, with the exception of *The Wall Street Journal*; until the remaining symbol of serious evaluation of American programming is left to John Dunning's remarkable and enduring *Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio*.

Both in his letter to me at the top of this introduction (which I did not ask for permission to reproduce, so I must sit in a corner), and in the body of his book, Rasovsky laments the state of the art: "I have discovered that the career of the contemporary American audio dramatist offers the most stimulating and direct route an artist can take to penury and obscurity," he writes in his very first paragraph. "Why would a supposedly intelligent individual devote himself to such an unremunerative, unacclaimed vocation? What secret ingredient does audio theater possess that makes it so seductive to rabid practitioners and devotees? The answer, I think, lies not in a special ingredient, but in the lack of one. Audio is blind."

I beg to differ. There is a classic story of a little girl who, when asked whether she preferred television to radio, answered, "I prefer radio."

"Why?"

"Because the pictures are better."

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After all, Beethoven and Mozart need no pictures, and it is well that the screen is blank under them. But I agree with Rasovsky over most of the distance in his text and I say without hesitation that his *Well-tempered Audio Dramatist* is the best text on radio production yet published. It has probing and adroitly-tempered disquisitions on project management, manuscript formats, acting on the microphone, casting, stereo blocking, sound effects and production in general. And though he does not take credit for it, Rasovsky has drawn most of the illustrations, charts and diagrams with unique skill, even at times using pointillism for some panels.

I have in several published collections of my own radio plays discussed production techniques and included what I thought were pretty good lexicons and readable production chatter, but Rasovsky has beaten me with the finest glossary ever to make its way into a book geared to studio production. I stand at attention and salute both *El Fiendo* and Yuri Rasovsky.

*Norman Corwin*  
July, 2006



# ONE

## Audio Drama in the Twenty-First Century?

### Give Me a Break!

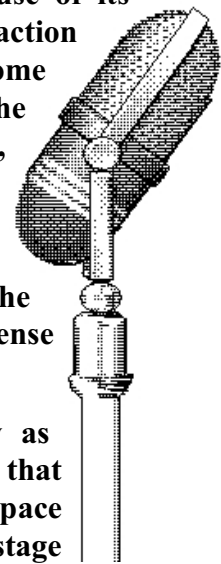
**au•di•o dram•a•tist** (ô'dē-ō drăm'ə-tĭst) *n.* a professional writer, producer and/or director of plays designed to be heard via electronic aural transmissions, such as radio broadcast and recorded media; an unsung benefactor of mankind.

This largely philistine society — in which wealth and glory mean more than life itself, in which visual and visceral stimulation crowd out all other kinds — has somehow managed to produce and sustain an abiding interest in the supposedly moribund art form of radio drama. It is less surprising that, despite overwhelming disincentives, people still make audio plays, than that people still listen to them. I, for one, began radio work in 1972, more than a decade after its official death. In the time between then and now, I have discovered that the career of the contemporary American audio dramatist offers the most stimulating and direct route an artist can take to penury and obscurity.

Why would a supposedly intelligent individual devote himself to such an unremunerative, un-acclaimed vocation? What secret ingredient does audio theater possess that makes it so seductive to its rabid practitioners and devotees? The answer, I think, lies not in a special ingredient, but in the lack of one. Audio is blind.

Audio is the most intensely visual of media precisely because of its sightlessness. It doesn't lack visuals; the audience supplies them. The action takes place, not on some stage in front of the spectator, nor even in some space surrounding the spectator, but within the listeners' minds. The distinguishing task of the audio dramatist is to use sound, language, voice, and music to evoke and to suggest - to inspire the listener into becoming part of the theater troupe, into taking on the functions of scenic designer, lighting technician, costumer, make-up artist, and special effects technician. No two listeners see the same audio play. The more the audio play stimulates images in the mind's eye, the more intense and personal the listening experience.

Perhaps then I shouldn't speak of audio's special quality as "blindness," which suggests a limitation. It's the other dramatic media that are limited. Einsteinian physics proscribes them: mass, time, and space dictate the fictive realities one can effectively evoke on the confines of a stage or within the borders of a screen. In contrast, audio, being incorporeal, has



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no boundaries of time or space, no limits. Anything or anybody can instantaneously move anywhere in or out of the universe. Two objects can occupy the same space. Objects can exist in several times and spaces at once, or in no time and space whatsoever, or in all times and spaces simultaneously. No wonder then that fantasy, comedy, exotica and introspection work so well in audio. It is the theater of the mind, the only theater of the mind, the quintessential theater of the mind.

That direct, intimate, interactive, intensely personal appeal to the imagination is why, since the first radio play was broadcast in the 1920s, someone somewhere has always produced, disseminated and listened to audio drama. And that is why — despite the tremendous commercial pressures of American broadcasting, despite TV's dominance of home entertainment, despite new technologies — someone always will.

### **Today's Audio Drama**

Recently listening to a recording of '40s radio plays, I was struck by how captivating they still are despite half a century's remove and the iffy sound quality of the transcriptions. I was driving late at night in a raging downpour, eager to escape the elements into my warm dry apartment. Yet, I couldn't tear myself away from the CD. I just stayed strapped in the wind and rain buffeted vehicle until the announcer's sign-off.

No wonder, I thought, that listeners, who would never sample the dramatic recordings being produced today, lap this old stuff up! There's a lot in these vintage productions that current audio dramatists can learn from. For, though there's more new drama in the audiobook market today than ever before, not much of it is any good. Much of it suffers from weak writing, amateurish acting, questionable taste and over-production.

On the other hand, OTR was produced with a powerful directness. Everything important was placed firmly in the foreground. Everything inessential was ignored. Actors were cast from the ranks of professional stage and film veterans and were picked for their distinctive, expressive and listener-friendly voices. While the plots and characters were no more or less sophisticated than those on modern television, the writing was often better, if only because dialogue had to convey the essential values. Until the advent of recording tape, radio plays were either broadcast live or transcribed in real time. While this engendered dangerous potential for bloopers, it forced a sense of immediacy that I, for one, find hard to resist.

Now, I'm not deaf to the flaws of these plays. The need to grind them out swiftly and inexpensively brought about a conventionalization of the grammar of production. For instance, few homes on radio were carpeted (you can't hear anyone walking on a carpet). All women wore high heels (to distinguish female from male footfalls). Nobody's clothes rustled. All enclosures were sound proof — once you shut the door, all outside noise evaporated. Most galloping horses had only three legs (too difficult to make the sound of four-legged horses with coconut shells). All cars needed new mufflers. Commercial American radio of the period could afford little time and money for innovation.

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There were exceptions -- Campbell Playhouse, CBS Workshop, Gunsmoke and X Minus One come immediately to mind -- but by and large old domestically-produced radio drama sounds cheap and as if constructed on an assembly-line.

Subsequent technology has given audio drama the potential for greater dynamism and range of expression. It is now possible to create atmosphere through "sound texturing," as Canadian producer Bill Howell calls it: One can layer in and manipulate ambient sounds to enhance the mood of a scene or a sense of place. Timing of elements can be adjusted by milliseconds until flawless. One can re-record, re-edit or re-mix until everything is just so. One can even create noises that the human ear has never before heard.

Perhaps of more importance, we have absolute freedom of content. Radio has always been subject to censorship of one kind or another. As long as producers avoid the airwaves, or broadcast via Sirius or XM satellite, audio theater can take on any subject, in any style using any language the marketplace will tolerate. While this may engender a certain amount of tasteless trash, it also provides room for sophisticated writing appealing to intelligent adults. The absence of time restrictions is also liberating. No longer do we have to shoehorn or stretch productions into 28- and 58-minute formats with room for commercial interruptions. Now, at least potentially, a sonic play can be worthy of permanent collections, like a book you enjoy coming back to or a fine painting on your wall that you never tire of gazing at.

Unfortunately, while more audio drama is being produced now than since American radio's heyday, not much of it is worth listening to, much less keeping in a permanent collection. The majority of producers and directors in this country today are enthusiasts rather than trained, disciplined professionals. Many have little or no background in theater, haven't a clue about directing actors, and lean toward the self-indulgent. What they do have is relatively inexpensive digital sound gear in their garages and spare bedrooms, plus the will and spare change to produce and publish audio plays.

They have nowhere to learn. What few books on the subject exist are either fifty or more years out of date, or written for foreign audio dramatists, whose listeners and traditions differ widely from the domestic variety. At this writing, the National Audio Theater Festivals (NATF) holds an annual workshop, but in the few days of its duration, little can be accomplished beyond stoking the enthusiasm of participants. Sporadic academic and other learning opportunities pop up from time to time, but they're few and far between. I hope to ameliorate this problem with this book, which, with NATF's and the National Endowment for the Arts' invaluable help, I am making available free on the world wide web. NATF will soon release a print version.

### **A Few Preliminary Remarks**

In this book, I've tried to be thorough and as nuts 'n bolts as possible. I admit that I've skimmed on the technical side. Technology advances so swiftly that, were this tome to contain detail about specific types and uses of gear, it would prove outdated before a human eye could see it. Besides, I'm not speaking to the engineer here -- or, for that matter, the writer and actor -- but to the producer and director.

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**My advice addresses U.S. audio drama only. Audiences, jargon, methods, and aesthetics vary from area to area. Although I have worked sporadically abroad, my experience in both theater and radio comes primarily from stateside activity, where conditions differ from just about everywhere else in the world. As it happens, I prefer the American sound, at least as practiced prior to the 1960s. It is the most direct and dynamic of those I've heard. In my work, I've tried to combine the American sound with the more European emphasis on content, on plays and approaches suitable for reasonably intelligent, literate adult listeners. I wouldn't begin to know how to produce for children, Afghans, or shock jock fans. For that matter, I've never acquired the knack of directing child actors. It takes a skill and temperament I don't possess. So, when it comes to kids, you're on your own.**

**As much as possible I've dwelled on the practical. I have included only as much theory as seemed to me absolutely necessary. Even so, this book only treats what I consider the basics.**

**I've noticed in the 1970s and '90s when waves of interest arose in producing audio drama, and even today, few would-be producers had much of a theater background. I think a firm foundation in the live theater is essential for the audio dramatist. It is simpler and faster to teach audio to theater people than to teach theater to audio people. In addition, I've found useful:**

- **a thorough knowledge of dramatic literature, the humanities and radio drama;**
- **a smattering of music theory;**
- **work experience in television and film;**
- **broad immersion in the world at large, particularly of cultures and modes of living that differ from or are diametrically opposed to the familiar;**
- **willingness to take risks (sometimes aptly called foolishness).**

**I can't stress enough the importance of preparation. Everyone who enters the studio — producer, director, actor, production assistant, engineer, foley walker — should walk in fully briefed and with ample homework done. Everyone should strive to eliminate as much post-production (“post” for short) as possible, for the more that gets accomplished before and during the voice sessions, the more unified the production elements, the cheaper the production costs, and the best use of your crew's time and energy. You can't be organized without doing the prep, and you can't work at your best unless you're organized.**

**Please also note that I have never learned to spell and that I'm one of the world's worst proof-readers. I beg your forgiveness for the typos and ersatz orthography you'll find herein. I hope you will alert me by e-mail to anything you find in this volume that requires clarification or modification.**

**If, as you read, you come upon an unfamiliar term, you can find it explained in the lexicon, or glossary, included in the Appendices. The lexicon includes terms and concepts that are not mention elsewhere in this book but that are handy for you to know. In fact, if**

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you read it from beginning to end, you can give yourself a fairly ample grounding in audio drama even if you skip the rest of this volume.

One last thing: After the publication of Samuel Johnson's Dictionary in 1755, a lady asked him how he came to define *pastern*, part of a horse's foot, as a horse's knee. He answered, "Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance." The same goes for me.

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# TWO

## Overview

This is a summary of the way audio plays are made, who makes them, with what, and where.

### The Studio

The basic studio configuration: One room to produce sounds in and another connected to it for the capturing devices and controls. A separate room or area set off by sound baffles may be used to record sounds that, for one reason or another, have to be isolated from the other sounds.

U.S. commercial recording studios are studios that you can rent for production. Most of their clients produce commercials, talking books, and industrials. Many are equipped for “sweetening,” that is, adding sound effects to film and video. Unlike studios for recording music, hardly any room is given to the space where the talent works. The control booth dominates and is filled to the brim with equipment, much of which is used to make up for the inadequacies of the recording environment. This configuration works for post, but is hell for recording the voice tracks (mastering). With digital technology, ANY area can be used for post, as long as the surrounding environment is quiet and you have a good set of headphones.

What you often encounter at public and community radio stations are studios barely adequate for normal station usage, which does NOT usually consist of sophisticated recording of the spoken word. If stations do have appropriate bells and whistles, usually they're packed up for remote-casts.

In Europe and Canada, I've worked in studios built for radio drama. Great attention is given to the recording environment. European production tends to emphasize mastering with little or no post-production. Inadequate recording environments impose heavy post upon you.

American music studios have the space, but not the acoustics. I've used them for drama, but find them as problematic as the tiny boxes in production rooms. They are built so that sound bounces off the walls, which adds pleasant overtones to the music. For audio drama you need a room that either produces few overtones, or several kinds that reproduce typical real life sonic environments. The "liveness" of the room is called "slap." One way to test a new recording space is to clap your hands and listen for slap.

Studios for mastering audio drama have to be big and have high ceilings, so that any sound bouncing off the walls is so faint by the time it reaches the mike as to be unnoticeable. They should contain nooks and crannies configured to reproduce various sonic environments, such as a "dead" room for outdoor scenes. In Stockholm, I've seen studios that have a dead end and a live end. In Cologne, WDR, the regional network, built

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tiny speakers into the walls. By feeding sound back through these speakers with various delays, producers can alter the room's acoustics while mastering.

The closest Americans come in rentable space for audio drama are foley and especially Audio Direct Recording (ADR) rooms: studios built for adding sound effects and overdubbing voices, respectively, to film and video. The usual production rooms are okay for narration, though, if too dead, they can sound like you're recording in a coffin.

You need far less control over acoustics when working before a live audience — which is good, because you probably won't get it. If the home audience knows you're working in a theatrical environment in front of a live audience, they will make the necessary imaginative allowances. You only need to guard against feedback and to make sure that naturally occurring reverberations do not muddy the sound. And you can forget about acoustical subtleties, or presenting work that depends on them.

### A Guide to the Gear

Almost all professional studios contain one or more of the following:

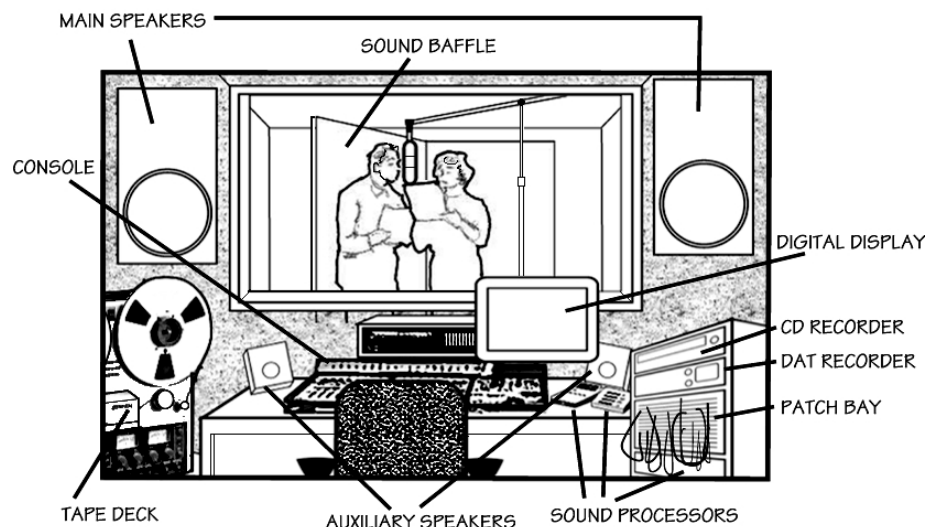
#### Microphones.

Patch bays. Wiring equipment together directly creates the time-wasting problem of hooking up and unhooking the equipment. A patch bay saves time and confusion. Wires plug in more or less permanently into the back and are patched in or out by toggle switches, patch cords, or other means in the front. Sound processors and other devices can usually be mounted in the bay to conserve space.

Console or mixing board. The master control regulating volume, equalization and stereo placement, among other things.

Recording instrument and recording medium. A 7½ - 15 ips open-reel tape recorder, a Digital Audio Tape (DAT) player, and/or a computer and hard drive, etc.

Playback for prerecorded music and sound. Typically, a CD player, sampler and/or tape player.





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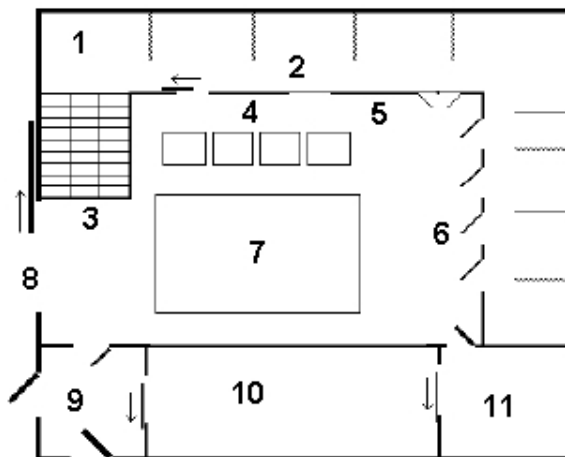
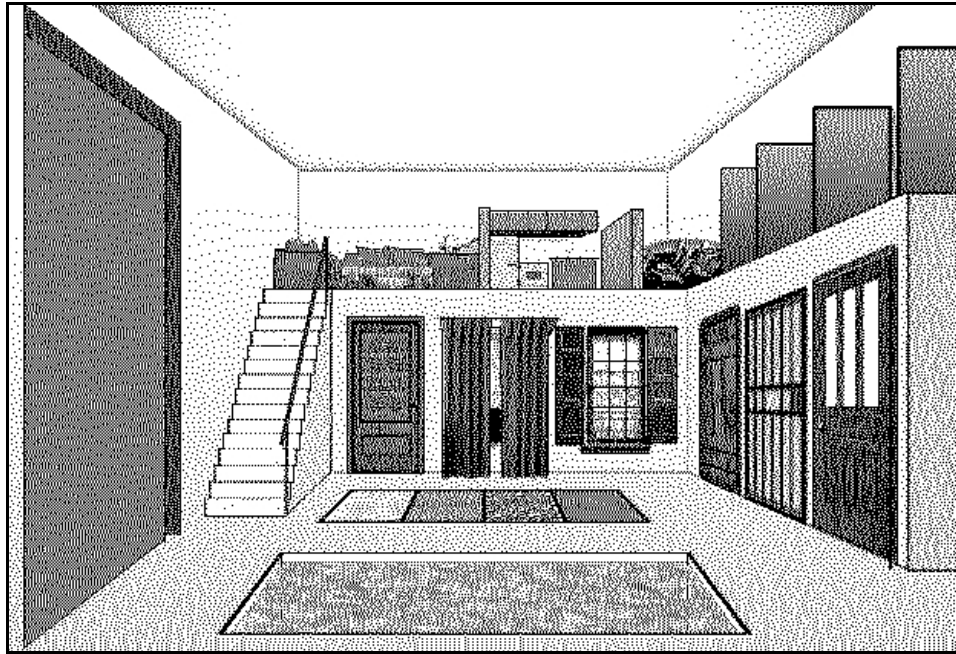
**Sound processors, which may include a "gain brain" and/or other noise reduction systems, preamplifiers, outboard equalizer, compressor for automatically regulating volume, reverb unit, de-esser, and numerous other gadgets.**

**Speaker(s). A principle pair capable of reproducing maximum fidelity, and a small, cheap pair so that you can hear if your mix will work under poor listening conditions.**

**Sound baffles. Portable free-standing units that deaden slap.**

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### The Ideal Audio Theater Production Studio



*floor plan*

#### Misc Features

The room is *float*ed: that is, it's a box inside a larger box cushioned by springs to shield against rumble from outside traffic.

Ample mike jacks and outlets.

Adjustable, non-glare overhead ceiling fixtures give ample light for script reading.

Speakers in walls can be adjusted to give reverberation to main first floor recording area.

#### Detail

1. First floor. Dead room for outdoor scenes, with adjustable floor to approximate sound of dirt, gravel, rock.

2. Second floor. Partitioned landing, furnished and including various removable wall and flooring surfaces to approximate sonic overtones of various interiors — kitchen, living room, bedroom, car, carriage, garage, office, etc.

3. Stairway divided vertically into three surfaces — wood, concrete, metal.

4. "Gravel pits," of various surfaces for footfall foley — hardwood, squeaky wood, marble, concrete, tile, etc.

5. Shuttered, draped window, built into wall for foley.

6. Foley doors of various surfaces and weights.

7. Three-foot deep sunken tub for water foley.

8. Large sliding door leading to storage area for foley equipment.

9. "Pressure chamber" connecting studio, control booth, storage, green room (actor's lounge), and lobby.

10. Control booth.

11. Isolation booth.

## The Process

The process unfolds in clearly demarcated steps in more or less the following order:

**Writing.** Turning ideas into text. Some plays, such as improvisations, don't require a text, but most do. Writing can be a group effort of the production ensemble or a solitary effort largely independent of the rest of the production process. Even in the latter case, no script is finished until it is performed at least once.

**Preproduction.** Everything you need to do once you have a script before you can go into the studio with the actors: planning and preparation, final script editing, casting, production meetings, scheduling, preliminary paper (contracts, schedules, budgets, etc.), pulling and preparing recorded and foley (mechanical) effects, renting or buying special equipment, scoring the source and background music, and "table work" (read-throughs, preliminary rehearsals). Thorough preproduction requires more skill and patience than any other step in the process. It repays the demands by contributing an immeasurable treasure of efficiency and smoothness to the rest of the process.

**Capturing or Mastering.** The process of channeling performance through capturing and processing devices to transmission or recording media, including the setting up of equipment and in-studio rehearsing. "Mastering" specifically means recording voice and/or music tracks, whether with or without effects and processing. The resulting exposed recording medium is called the master.

**Post-Production.** In live audio drama, i.e. — plays performed and transmitted simultaneously — the process necessarily ends with capturing. You're stuck with whatever came through the mixing board, up the transmitter and out into the ether. When you record for delayed transmission, you can continue massaging the master tracks. Everything that ensues after the mastering is referred to as post-production or simply post.

**Editing.** Physically, electronically or digitally cutting and pasting an exposed recording medium, such as tape. This includes assembly or conformance, in which the best takes are chosen and assembled in order, and fine tuning to eliminate unwanted and accidental noises and to refine the pace and rhythm of the recorded sounds.

**Overdubbing.** Adding sound effects, music, and additional voices in sequence to the sounds on the master. You can do this, with or without electronic processing, either by laying down the new material on empty tracks of the master or by copying everything to empty tracks of a virgin medium. You may segregate some sounds on separate tracks and combine or premix others.

**Mixing.** Combining and processing (i.e., electronically adjusting relative sound quality and levels) the effects, music, and voices into their final aggregated sound. The resulting exposed recording medium is called the final mix.

**Packaging.** Preparing the program for transmission by producing announcements and mixing them with the final mix to one or more

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transmission masters. The same program could reach the public via several venues, each requiring its own announcements. You may customize the program for individual stations. Later, you may publish the program on cassette for sale, eliminating the act breaks, and substituting publishing acknowledgements for network identification announcements and system cues. You may have to change the packaging again for cable release, foreign broadcast, etc.

**Final Paper.** Preparing a record of the who, what, when, where and cost of production for archiving, fiscal reporting, project analysis, budgeting and legal purposes. Heavy post is typical of American production. This is partly forced on producers by the inadequacies of available mastering studios and personnel limitations, and partly caused by the influence of sound designers. Heavy post can suck up incredible amounts of the production time and money. An effect that you could have quickly laid in as you mastered the voices will take three times longer to lay down in post.

On the other hand, post gives you an extraordinary amount of focus and control over the production. You can concentrate better when you do one thing or a small group of things at a time. It's harder to juggle sound elements, such as relative volume and cuing, when you mix as you tape than it is when you separate those steps. Without post, you employ more hands and more rehearsal, but get less precision. In post, you and one engineer can do everything. Plays with complicated sound plots generally benefit from heavy post.

Some producers don't believe in any post. Or, rather, they do the post *before* they lay down the voice tracks. At ERT, the Greek national broadcast entity in Athens, I saw a crew record a very complex audio play that wa Prerecorded effects and music had been prepared and cued before the actors showed up. Several foley operators worked in the studio with the actors. The studio manager edited on the fly: if there was a glitch during the performance, he rewound the tape, played it back, and, when he got to the editing point, "punched" into record mode while the tape was rolling. After they finished, the whole crew rushed out without even spot-checking the punches. They were done.

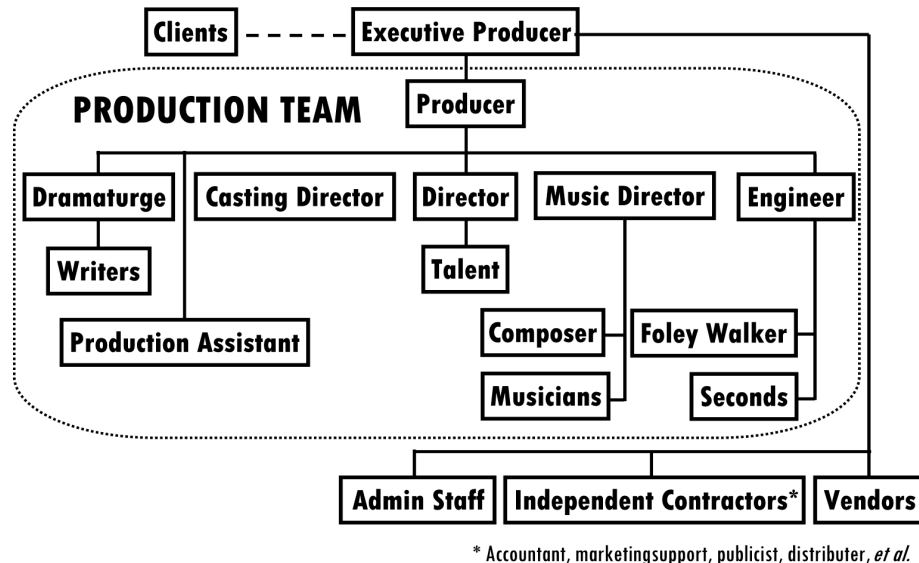
Granted favorable working conditions and a modest sound plot, I prefer to master voices with discrete (foley) sounds. These are sounds of limited duration that are cued by or that cue voices and other sounds. I distinguish them from backgrounds: musical beds and bridges, and atmospheres or ambience/presence tracks (*e.g.*, environmental sounds, such as birds twittering or rain). Cutting into backgrounds is tricky. If you splice over a musical phrase, for instance, the audience will hear it. Therefore, I lay backgrounds in after the edit; to avoid tedium, I sometimes save this step for the final mix.

With a very simple show, particularly if you're working in mono, it's possible to lay down everything as you master. Post then consists of editing takes together and adding the packaging, which you can leave to a subordinate while you get on with other matters requiring executive control. Several producers dump even complex post on the

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unsupervised engineer. Not a few engineers, especially those who fancy themselves sound designers, prefer to post without the producer. The post can make or break a production. There's a reason the phrase "We'll save it in the mix" gets heard so often. I think a producer should supervise every creative choice at every step of production, especially the post.

In the end, the demands of the task at hand and working conditions influence how much post you do and how you order the steps.



## Personnel

Now that we've seen what has to be done, let's take a look at who does what. A modest production — small cast, no music, few effects — requires only a small production crew. The various functions listed below will have to be filled whether the operation is small or large, but jobs can and do overlap. The smaller the production, the more the doubling of tasks. I prefer a lean, efficient operation.

Obviously, the busier the shop, the more personnel it needs; the more stable its operations, the more personnel it can afford. I say 'more stable' rather than 'wealthier' because with plenty of time and money, you, the producer, can often afford to work leisurely, taking on more chores personally or parcelling them out to fewer subordinates. But, lacking a stable or routine production schedule, you can't easily take on fulltime support persons, or provide enough work to properly train regular parttimers. You have to make do with 'occasional' employees, who are more difficult to supervise, for the duration of the project. In any professional circumstance, if you can't keep 'em busy, don't put 'em on the payroll. "Idle hands," etc., etc.

## Executive Producer

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One person in the chain-of-command keeps one hand on the office and the other on the studio. The executive producer (EP) is the ultimate "suit," the boss or client, the person who finds the money, defines the project, hires the producer and takes charge of such essential non-production functions as general administration, promotion, marketing, and distribution. In an institutional environment, sometimes the title is honorific and the putative EP does little or nothing. At other times, the Executive Producer takes all the initiative to launch a project, and get it funded and listened to. If the producer is also directing, the EP may attend the mastering sessions to trouble-shoot snafus with the studio executives or talent agents. A series, or even a single program, may employ several producers, but there's rarely any room for more than one EP. After the initial planning and conceptualizing, good EPs stay out of the producer's way.

### **The Production Team**

**Producer.** An elastic term in broadcasting that could mean anything from a fancy gofer to the big cheese. In this book, the term refers to the individual in charge of a given production. The producer has management and artistic functions. S/he hires and supervises all subordinates, tracks time and money expenditures, troubleshoots, etc. The producer also is responsible for production design and supervises post-production and packaging.

**Director.** The individual responsible for matters relating to text. The director may help the writer edit the script or even develop the script with the writer, will cast the actors and guide them through the taping, and ought, but doesn't always, select the most desirable takes and edit as needed to fine tune performances. So often are the functions of producer and director combined in audio drama that if you say, "I produce audio drama for a living," it is taken for granted that you produce and direct.

**Floor Director.** An individual in the same room with the actors. Communicates via a headset with the director in the booth, passes on the director's instructions, using hand signals, to the talent as they perform. I use a floor director when I'm trying to lay down tracks in real time and 1) the production is being broadcast live or taped before a "house" or studio audience, or 2) I'm working under severe time or financial restraints.

**Writer.** The *writer* on any given project may be the ultimate author of the work being produced, a translator of a work in a foreign tongue, or an adapter who has transformed a work from another medium. Some audio dramatists enjoy working with writers on new material. I prefer writers who have been dead several centuries. Depending on how seriously the (living) writer takes the job, s/he may, and should, participate at mastering sessions to offer rewrites and guidance, as needed.

**Casting Director.** In some communities, particularly where talent is routinely contracted through agents, a casting director, who knows the local talent and is respected by agents, is indispensable. I've also employed casting directors when working outside my home base, as when I was headquartered in Chicago while

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taping in London, New York or Los Angeles, where I did not know the talent. But in my home town, I had no need of casting support.

**Musical Director.** Most often these days, one person conducts, acts as contractor (that is, hires the musicians) and as Arranger (edits and orchestrates the score). If the music is original, the composer may do all these things. The only function that the musical director can't easily do, if conducting, is act as music producer.

**Music Producer.** Sits in the booth and guides the recording of the music. Sometimes the engineer has the training and experience to do this. In fact, I've had a much easier time finding decent to excellent music engineers/producers than competent dramatic engineers.

**Talent.** A collective and individual noun referring to professionals whose voices are being recorded. In a union shop, all radio drama talent comes under AFTRA jurisdiction. Subspecies include:

Actors, the persons who impersonate characters;

Narrators, specialists in story-telling;

Announcers, those who read announcements, lists (such as production credits), and titles;

Walla or "Supers." Audio supernumeraries, extras; the persons who make crowd noises. 'Walla,' refers both to the humans who make the noise *and* the noise itself.

**Studio Manager,** also called Recordist, Production Manager or Chief Engineer. The head techie on an audio drama. During voice-mastering sessions, this engineer works the mixing board and supervises subordinate Grams (recorded sound and music) Operator and Foley (live sound) Walker. The studio manager continues to engineer through the post. Although I prefer to work with a studio manager system, in the U.S. you often have only one engineer and, if you're lucky, a second, or studio gofer. Or you may find yourself dealing with one engineer at a time — a mastering engineer for voice recording, a music engineer to master and premix music tracks, an editor, and a mixer, none of whom have any stake or overview of the project. This serial monogamy has all the pitfalls of an assembly line manned by trained seals.

**Production Assistant (P.A.)** The producer's and director's assistant. Duties vary according to custom in a producing community. I may employ one to three P.A.s to do the scheduling, hold script, keep a track sheet, log production time and tapes, supervise conformance editing and troubleshoot. Nina Callahan, my favorite P.A., assigned to me by the CBC in Toronto, did secretarial chores as well. The BBC P.A. with whom I worked did as little as she could get away with and was insulting to boot.

**Dramaturg.** If the kind of work you do demands that you solicit and read a lot of scripts, you may add a person or committee to read and recommend scripts for production, and help plan your repertory. In theater companies, an individual doing this arduous job — and believe me, it *is* arduous, since most of what you see is junk — is called a dramaturg or literary manager.

### The Auteur

This term, borrowed from film criticism, refers to an individual who assumes the functions of both producer and director (and may write and perform as well), whose artistic contribution is most responsible for the work's distinctive character. One of the great cinema auteurs, Orson Welles, was also one of the great auteurs of radio theater. Today's American audio dramatists tend to be auteurs, or, as I call them, Audio Dramatists. In my opinion, great artistic unity derives from combining the producer and director in one person. I highly recommend this approach.

### Types of Audio Theater

There are three basic types of theater. As producer and/or director, your job and the way you go about it differ with these types. Whether or not the group with which you work identifies itself as one type or another, you should *realistically* assess the objectives and expectations of the production ensemble so that you can adjust your goals and methods accordingly.

**Community or Recreational Theater.** An essentially non-professional arena that provides recreational activity for the participants. Your pools of talent and crew are limited to volunteers who vary in ability and commitment. The quality of production matters less than the enjoyment of the people mounting it. You have to be ever-mindful of their satisfaction, mollify tempers, make numerous allowances, schedule around the professional and family obligations of your cast and crew, and decrease the number and intensity of your demands.

Typically, the audience for community theater groups consists of the friends and relations of the members. The responsibility of the amateur members to sell tickets and clean up after themselves is enforced more strictly than any obligation to behave and do one's best. Often, the audio community company is allied with a community radio station, a non-profit broadcaster staffed by volunteers. Less frequently, although perhaps more advisable, the players produce cassettes and CDs of their productions that they sell to friends and relations. In this way, or by imposition of a membership fee, the members pay all or most of the production costs — as well they should. After all, it's their self-indulgence.

**Little Theater.** This, too, is largely an unpaid endeavor manned by amateurs. However, the participants get their satisfaction from providing a service to the community-at-large. They aspire to quality. For a good number of years, some of the most important drama produced in the United States came out of the little theater movement. Eugene O'Neill started out with the amateur Provincetown Players. As one of the leaders of a little theater ensemble, you still have to indulge personalities to some degree and be sensitive to the needs of volunteers, but you can make many of the demands that professionals expect.

Some of the participants have artistic ambitions, but no desire to enter show business professionally. In 1963, I started my career in the celebrated little theater at Chicago's Hull House, from which the city's professional theater movement sprung.



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**A decade later, my first radio plays were being produced within a little theater set-up, though our station, WNIB, was commercial. By 1976, my National Radio Theater was fully professional and being heard all over the English-speaking world.**

**Your talent pool of volunteers is probably small. Not everyone will comfortably fit the roles available or perform as competently as you would wish. But you do have one advantage. I find that the sincerity and energy of volunteers in performance often exceeds that of professionals and more than compensates for all sorts of faults. Amateurs will sometimes throw themselves into their roles with a gusto that I find immensely stimulating and enjoyable.**

**At this writing, the majority of audio drama in the United States — and at this writing there is a kind of renaissance abroad in the land — is produced by community and little theater operations.**

**Professional Audio Theater. At this time, professional audio theater is manned by people who make some or all of their living in show business. They may have come together as volunteers for audio to satisfy artistic ambitions, or they may be paid. They may be working under union auspices (AFTRA and NABET) or they may not. What distinguishes the professional operation from the amateur is that everyone involved in the former possesses professional level skill and experience. The producer and director can make professional demands. The listener can confidently expect to hear a professional-sounding production.**

**The supposed advantage of working under a union contract is that, presumably, union members have professional skill and experience. In reality, the NABET techies I've worked with have been the worst sound engineers of my professional experience. On the other hand, AFTRA actors tend to possess more acumen and a better attitude than non-members. Furthermore, casting exclusively from the AFTRA membership assures that you will avoid wasting time auditioning the numerous crazies and incompetents who show up at community theater casting calls.**

**I prefer to work under professional auspices. The arena *you* choose will depend on your personal preferences and the opportunities you either find or make for yourself.**

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# THREE

## Project Management

### Getting Organized

Putting first things first, before we get to the good stuff, we have to address the drudgery of organizing and overseeing production. It's common for the beginning production team to find the managing end of things difficult, time consuming and stressful. It can exhaust you and deflect your attention from the important matter of making the production as good as possible. On the other hand, neglecting administrative concerns can totally derail your efforts. You have to deal with them whether you want to or not. As you gain experience, you will need decreasing amounts of time effort and anxiety to get things done.

Leadership talent, the willingness to delegate tasks, and business acumen are important factors in management of anything. Unfortunately, they are too weighty to discuss in this book. Futile, too, I suspect. You're probably not an MBA. Most artsy types aren't. Just the opposite. You have not entered the arena of audio theater because you want to flex your administrative muscles. You may not have any administrative muscles to flex. Further, most of you probably have no effective institutional back-up — no radio station, network or corporation providing you office space, office machines and administrative support.

For the old hand as well as the novice, successful management depends upon careful advance planning. That's why I dwell on the subject in this chapter. The more forethought and common sense goes into your project, the smoother it will run. The larger or more complex the project, the more detailed the planning ought to be. And the two things you have to plan for are costs and time.

### Production Budgets

Unless an "angel" is willing to write you a check every time an expense comes up, or all labor, materials and services are being provided gratis, estimating production costs is your first step. Because money is so tight for the audio dramatist, one needs to keep tight reign on finances. Before you can do that, you have to figure out what they are. The producer may need all or some of the following budgets, depending on the size of the project:

An initial estimate of potential costs figured for the way you would ideally like the production to go.

External budgets, based on your internal ones, are used for show. Within a bureaucracy, you show them to your higher ups or the governing board. You also use them in business and grant proposals. External budgets need

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not be as detailed as internal ones. For your own purposes, you want to make sure you have thoroughly covered all costs. You also want enough detail so that you can reconstruct the basis of your computations. But no one else has to or wants to see this detail. Besides, you may have good reasons for suppressing some detail, or adjusting figures for public consumption.

One or More Pre-production Revisions based on either your best guess of what the market will bear (that is, income you can realistically raise) or what you have actually received. Normally, this means scaling the project down to avoid over-spending.

Working budget in which, right before launching the project, you adjust figures based on the money available and any new cost information, such as inflationary factors, the latest air fares, and new production technologies.

Adjustments during the project based on cash flow, reflecting what you have left in the kitty to finish up. A cash flow is a periodic statement of income and expenses. If the cash flow says you have overspent, you have to rebudget remaining work. If you have under-spent, you can redistribute the remaining cash to cover expense areas, or “line items,” where you feel you could use it (in your salary, for instance).

It is dangerously easy to forget important cost centers when you’re budgeting. That’s why I developed a boilerplate boilerplate set-up on a computer spreadsheet. The boilerplate contains all the line items I could possibly need for producing, promoting, marketing and distributing dramatic audio. When budgeting, I may not anticipate incurring costs in all the line items represented, but can always delete unused line items. The boilerplate prevents me from overlooking essential costs.

Following is an annotated version of the boilerplate. Categories appear in order of emphasis. Within categories, arrange line items in descending order of costliness — except with personnel, which you should list as shown. Round-off numbers to the nearest \$5 or \$10.

### Boilerplate Budget

#### Salaries and Wages<sup>1</sup>

Executive Producer	00% fte 0 mos <sup>2 3</sup>	\$0
Project Director	00% fte 00 mos	0
Support personnel	2 persons @ 00% fte 00 mos <sup>4</sup>	0
Talent*	see detail <sup>5</sup>	0
Walla* <sup>6</sup>	20 @ AFTRA scale	0
Singers*	25 @ AFTRA scale	0
*AFTRA H&R	@ 10.75% of AFTRA wages	0
Fringe	@ 00% of all wages	0
Total: Salary and wages		\$0

#### Fees for Professional Services<sup>7</sup>

Producer(s)/Director(s)	0 persons @ \$0 each	0
Script Writers	0 scripts @ \$0 each	0

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Permissions <sup>8</sup>	see detail	0	
Music composition	0 compositions @ \$0 each	0	
Music Producer	contracting, conducting, production	0	
Musicians <sup>9</sup>	0 musicians @ \$0 ea	0	
Casting Director	general & guest artist cast'g	0	
Dramaturg <sup>10</sup>	fee	0	
Technical personnel	0 persons @ \$0 each	0	
Consultants	0 @ \$0 ea	0	
Marketing, adv. &	fees and expenses	0	
Payroll Service <sup>11</sup>	see detail	0	
<b>Total: Fees</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Materials &amp; Supplies</b>			
Research Materials	books, recordings, etc.	0 <sup>12</sup>	
Production Supplies	tapes, DATs, etc.	0	
Scores & Parts	acquisition & copying	0	
<b>Total: Material &amp; Supplies</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Facilities</b>			
Casting facility	8 hrs @ \$40/hr	0	
Production Studio	175 hrs @ av. \$80/hr	0	
<b>Total: Facilities</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Travel &amp; Subsistence</b>			
transportation costs	9 trips @ av. \$700/trip	0	
subsistence	65 days @ av. \$130/day	0	
<b>Total: Travel &amp; subsistence</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Marketing, Distribution &amp; Promotion</b>			
Advertising	full-page ad in Current <sup>13</sup>	0	
Literature	press & marketing materials	0	
CDs & packaging <sup>14</sup>	500 @ \$4.98/ea	0	
Mailing services	CD postage, mailers, labels	0	
<b>Total: Marketing, etc.</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Other</b>			
Telecommunications	14 mos @ av. \$45/mo	0	
Postage & shipping	14 mos @ av. \$65/mo	0	
Legal & Accounting <sup>15</sup>	contracts, compliance audit, etc	0	
<b>Total: Other</b>			<b>0</b>
<b>Total Direct costs</b>			
	indirect <sup>16</sup> @ 18.9% of \$167,400 <sup>17</sup>		<b>0</b>
<b><u>TOTAL PROJECT EXPENSES</u></b> <sup>18</sup>			<b>\$0</b>

### Notes on Budget

1. List here anyone to whom you have to pay fringe benefits, such as Social Security, and from whose check you have to deduct payroll taxes. Any such person is said to be salaried. The IRS has clamped down in recent years and now has guidelines for figuring who should get a salary and who can get a fee.
2. This means that over the life of the project, the Executive Producer will devote a given percent of his professional time to it.
3. In this column, you show as tersely as possible the basis for your computation.

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4. The P.A. will only work eight months, during which time s/he will devote only the stipulated percentage of professional time on the project.

5. In addition to the main budget, you may need to include pages of budget detail for complex line item computations. For instance, mine is a union shop, subscribing to the AFTRA/Public Radio Agreement. Further, I work in L.A., where I often have to book talent through their agents who receive a commission. The formula for figuring what I owe the talent can be complicated. On a spreadsheet, of course, I can set up formulas so that the computer does the arithmetic after I plug in certain variable figures, more or less as follows:

	\$0	rehearsal/recording rate (1 <sup>st</sup> hr mandatory)
x	<u>0</u>	number of estimated rehearsal/recording hours
	\$0	
+	<u>\$0</u>	basic broadcast rights
	\$0	
x	<u>0%</u>	step-up for A/V rights
	\$0	
x	<u>0%</u>	step-up for foreign rights
	\$0	
x	<u>0%</u>	step-up for "supplemental" markets*
	\$0	
x	<u>10%</u>	agent commission
	\$0	
x	<u>0</u>	number of actors
	\$0	TOTAL

\*"Supplemental" markets include cassettes, CDs, in-flight audio, commercial stations, and just about anything that is considered neither public radio and A/V.

6. "Walla" means crowd noises, the audio equivalent to movie extras or stage supernumeraries.

7. This category includes service contractors and sub-contractors who are not on your payroll. Whenever any of the below DO appear on your payroll, you should show them under Salaries above.

8. Permissions include costs for obtaining the rights to any pre-existing copyrighted material, such as literary works you are adapting, needle-drop fees for prerecorded sound effects and music, popular songs, etc.

9. Artists who play music instruments are paid differently than those who sing and, if union, work under the jurisdiction of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM). Normally, you hire a music contractor whom you pay a negotiated amount that the contractor disperses to the musicians and that includes payroll taxes and union benefits. So, as far as you're concerned, the musicians get fees not salaries. The contractor, not you, is responsible for the payroll niceties.

10. The dramaturg is your librarian, script editor and repertoire advisor.

11. Even if you pay salaries to permanent staff, you may wish to consider using a payroll service for such casual employees as talent. The cost is more than offset in the savings in unemployment insurance and paperwork.

12. This figure is pulled out of the hat, though not necessarily out of thin air. For this particular project, though I cannot accurately guess what incidental books and articles I may have to buy or copy, I can safely assume from past experience that the total will not exceed \$500. "Soft" figures, like this one, can help you provide yourself a buffer against overspending in other line items. Often, in non-profit presentation budgets, the funder does not like to see a separate line item for contingencies, necessitating your disguising them in soft figures.

13. *Current* is a trade publication.

14. This is a broadcast project for which I intended to send stations CDs and bypass the telecommunications satellite.

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15. A certain amount of legal and accounting is figured as indirect, but those services, such as the "compliance" audit are direct because they wouldn't be incurred were we not doing the project.

16. Indirect costs are those not directly attributable to the project, but which are necessary for its completion. When you have only one project taking up the full time of your entire crew for an extended period of time, then all costs are direct for the duration of the project. Otherwise, you cannot accurately apportion such general op costs as the local phone bill, rent, utilities, photocopying, office supplies, etc., among your projects. Yet, you cannot do the projects without them. Further, your projects have to pay their fair portion of your general operating.

How do you figure indirect then? By prorating them along the life of the project. Assuming you have made a general operating budget for the year, you can use the following formula:

$$\text{annual budget} \times \% \text{ fte devoted to project} = \text{indirect}$$

Full-time equivalency (fte) means the amount of time the project would take up if you dropped everything else and devoted full resources on it until it was done. In reality, working around other responsibilities, you may take six weeks to finish a one-hour program, the fte may only be one forty-hour work week. With an annual general op of \$100,000, a twenty-six week season of one-hour plays would — lemme see now . . .

$$26 \text{ wks is } \frac{1}{2} \text{ yr, so } 100,000 \times 50\% = 50,000$$

. . . it would incur \$50,000 indirect. In a budget, indirect is expressed as a percentage of the direct costs. At an average cost of \$20,000 per program, the production budget we've been discussing would show this line item:

$$\text{Indirect} \quad @ \quad 9.62\% \text{ of } \$520,000 \quad 50,000$$

17. The dollar figure is the sum of your direct costs less any "distorting" items, such as equipment purchases, or anything else that is not supposed to have an effect on overhead.

How do you figure the percentage? Large institutions working on grants and government contracts work out seemingly arbitrary formulas. Universities typically claim thirty percent or more off the top for their indirect. When creating a budget for your in-house use, you want to program in your real costs, so you have to separately budget your indirect. To do this, figure your costs for keeping your operation open for one year without any projects in the shop. Even if you produce nothing in 12 months, you still have to shell out for rent, utilities, payroll and insurance. You still have supplies, travel, fees and research connected with developing new projects, staying abreast of the trade, wheeling and dealing.

18. In a proposal budget, when you are seeking 100% of the costs from one funder, this line item should be labeled AMOUNT REQUESTED.

## **Scheduling**

### **Before Scheduling**

Even relatively simple jobs require advance scheduling with a calendar. Everybody will want to know when to show up and how long you will need them. The more complicated the project, the more you need to assign dates to your tasks and the more detailed your scheduling ought to be.

Before you can begin, however, you need to have certain ducks in a row. Without them, you can't even tell if your project is feasible. Nor can you estimate how long these tasks may take. They may include all or some of the following:

**Property acquisition**, property in this sense being the play or literary work upon which your play is to be based. You have to choose (or have chosen for you, as is often the case with a work-for-hire) the property and, if it is not in the public domain, secure the audio production rights. Or you have to commission someone to dramatize the property for audio, or write an original audio play.

**Financing**: Research and reckon a production budget. Secure the money to cover your bottom line from your front office or such sources as venture capital, grants, gifts, loans.

**Contracting**: you must recruit, hire and execute contracts with your production crew, which may include all or some of the following:

- writer
- director
- P.A.(s)
- composer or stock music library
- musical director ( who is often composer and music contractor)
- foley walker
- production facilities (studio(s) and rehearsal space)
- engineer(s)
- equipment rental sources (e.g., remote gear, extra or special microphones, sound baffles)
- transportation
- catering (Food ought to be provided, if possible, for all-day sessions, because, even if a decent eatery is located nearby, you have more control of talent's time when they eat on the premises.)

**Union Arrangements**. Depending upon the pool of potential coworkers available to you, you may have to deal with one or more of three unions: the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) and, very rarely) the National



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**Association of Broadcast Engineers and Technicians (NABET). Normally, a licensed contractor (your composer or musical director) deals with AFM. You pay the contractor an agreed-upon fee covering all the musicians he engages, plus certain out-of-pocket expenses such as copyist services. Though vocalists fall under AFTRA's jurisdiction, the contractor handles their arrangements as well. When it comes to actors, you have to work out an agreement directly with AFTRA. This may take a while as the nearest AFTRA local may not be close by, may not be responsive or may not know anything about rates for audio drama.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Setting Deadlines**

**All scheduling starts with the final deadline, the date when you must turn in the finished, "packaged" production. Factor completion of all other tasks backward from the final deadline. (See calendar instructions below)**

**Always set a deadline before the date you actually need a task completed. Give yourself wiggle room for contingencies. If you need three work days to get something done, allow yourself five or more.**

**Never set the beginning of a task on the same day you end a previous task that it is dependent on. For instance, before you can copy scripts, you have to finish typing them. Failing to do so means that, if the typing isn't done on time, you won't be able to remain on schedule for the copying or any further tasks dependent on having the scripts in the hands of your crew.**

**Schedule no deadlines for the last minute. You need to keep the last minute free for troubleshooting.**

### **How Much Time Do You Need?**

**This is always a matter of educated guess work. The more experience you acquire, the more accurate your time projections are likely to be. Nevertheless, you will always just be guessing, for which reason you should always allow yourself ample time. Perhaps the experience of others can guide the beginner somewhat, as long as you recognize that individual circumstances, working methods and talents have to be factored in.**

**For instance, in radio's heyday, producers commonly left only enough time for one read-through and performance. Typically, the sound effects guys would independently pull sound effects and stock music from their library of devices and recordings before the session. Before the advent and wide use of transcription devices, the first real-time performance for the East Coast and Middle West was a dress rehearsal for the West Coast real-time performance two hours later. Cast and crew could protract the production time**

<sup>1</sup>

Audio dramatists don't usually, if ever, deal with the Writers Guild (WGA), which has bigger fish to fry in film and television. However, I try to keep an up-to-date copy of WGA's published rates to use as a budgeting guide. For the same reason I keep AFTRA's applicable published rates handy. Unfortunately, AFM, the musician's union, does not allow non-members to see its rate schedules.

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because they did this every day, the scripts weren't particularly challenging, and the sound of old radio drama was highly conventionalized.

In contrast, when working "in studio" as opposed to before a house audience in real time, I generally figure three minutes with the talent for every one minute of estimated playing time. I leave a little extra time at the beginning of each session day, because talent tends to start slow and rev up into a stride. For every half-day with actors, I need a day-and-a-half of editing and mixing.

Employing experienced Hollywood actors and directors, LA Theatre Works gives its casts two-and-a-half days for rehearsal plus five performances in real-time before a live audience at L.A.'s Skirball Cultural Center.

**Roger Gregg, an American working in Ireland, notes:**

This year we did one hour long radio plays [ 56' 30" time slot]. We started at 9:30 and worked straight through until we were done which most Saturdays turned out to be around 7 or 8 in the evening.... No time for a script read through in the morning - which normally I would like to do. The actors all had their scripts a week ahead of time and most actually had read them. The dialogue and spot effects mostly recorded before a stereo spread also with spot fx in live with the actors. This takes a read through or two to set — and serves as the rehearsal.

All the session material recorded on Pro Tools TDM, put on DVD and in turn loaded onto my home Pro Tools system. It takes me about 2 to 2½ weeks to post produce an hour. This is composing and recording the music and adding in additional fx, ambiences, editing for time, test mixes and so on. Composing and fine tuning the music can take a great deal of time. Doing 3 minutes of music to fit under one scene can take a day or two to put together. The studio is mine so I work when I can.

**For a half hour play, New York based teacher and producer Sue Zizza wants:**

...at least 3 full read-throughs before going into the studio — and for leads I like to work a bit with them prior to getting to read-throughs — helps the rest of the cast. As for taping, hard to say — but on average for a half hour play I plan about 6 hours recording session juts for voice tracks — especially if I can't have the cast all together. I figure 1 hour of post/edit time — which includes live SFX and music — for every hour of the play from start to finish — that way I am happy if it comes out under — so a 28 minutes piece can take 28 hours.

However I can usually save about a third of this time if I can get: 1) Manual SFX to record in and around the voice tracks; 2) Have all actors in the same place for each scene — not in recording the play in order — just having everyone all together for the scene; 3) None of the music I am using is original and also needs to be recorded.

**Says Bay Area producer Erik Bauersfeld:**

The only radio drama series I produced having a regular schedule was the Black Mass series in the 1960's. The half-hour programs, starting from scratch, were each ready for broadcast every two weeks for roughly a three-year period. The schedule was something like: three days to select and adapt and type the

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script, one day to cast and schedule recording, one hour rehearsal, usually no rehearsal, just a read through and the recording and retakes until I (and the actors) were satisfied. Two days in editing room, add a few hours getting sound effects and music, one night (8:00 PM till 2:00 AM) mixing. Another few hours editing the mix! Boxing, labeling, duplicating, up till broadcast time.

I suggest the following rule-of-thumb for novices: for every half-hour of program time, allow yourself seven hours (a production day) for rehearsal and recording, plus from two days to a week for post, depending on the complexity of the sound and music plot. Give yourself more time to prep for real-time production before a house audience, including one full-dress rehearsal with all forces.

### Boilerplate and Calendar

Let's say you're scheduling an hour-long original play. You want to plug in tasks and assign responsible for each. There's only you the producer, the director and the P.A. to see that everything gets done. So, you sketch out a schedule like the one below. Or, you pull out a boilerplate schedule that you have created in the computer a while back and have up-dated from time to time as you have gained experience. It may look something like this:

KEY: (P) = producer (D) = director (PA) = production assistant				
Project Day	Activity			
Before Day 1	Property selected, rights obtained; funding & production budget in place; union agreements signed; director, PA, studio, foley walker, composer contracted; deadline set (P, PA)			
Day 1	edit, finalize script (P and/or D)			
2				
3				
4		schedule production meeting (PA)		
5				
6	production meeting (P, D)			
7	create breakdowns (P, D)		scripts to foley walker, studio, composer (PA)	
8		schedule general auditions (P)		
9	send audition announcements (PA)			
10		schedule music meet'g (PA)		

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Project Day	Activity		
11		create taping schedule, casting sides, tech notes (P, D)	
12			
13	music meeting (P)		
14			
15	schedule audition appointments (PA)		
16			
17		create, duplicate sides, casting materials, prepare for generals (PA)	
18			
19			
20	general casting call (all)	casting review (P) (D)	
21			
22	schedule call-backs (PA)		
23			
24			
25	call-back auditions (all)		
26	review call-backs (all)		
27	notify talent of casting results, schedule production (P, PA)	sched techies meetings (PA)	
28			
29		process talent contracts; copy & mail scripts, call sheets to talent, studio (PA)	
30	meetings with engineer/sound designer & foley walker sometime during this week (P)		
31			
32			
33			
34		prepare & duplicate production forms, contact sheet (PA)	trouble-shoot (all)
35			

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

Project Day	Activity		
36	confirm sessions by phone, email (PA)		
37			
38			
39	read-through (all)		
40	session 1 (all)		
41	session 2 (all)		
42	post-production, packaging (P)	up-date talent rolodex (PA)	music session (P)
43			music mix (P)
44			
45		talent payroll (PA)	
46		organize production records (PA)	
47 ff	final paper work; production payroll; marketing; distribution; promotion, etc. (P, PA)		

Were the play being performed before a house audience, you'd have to program in a meeting with your sound crew and the resident staff of the performance space you're working in to discuss technical requirements. You'd need time to set-up your equipment in the auditorium, and you'd need a sound check before every dress rehearsal and performance to make sure all gear is in working order. Before the first performance, you'd have to arrange for reservations and ticket sales, for admission of your invited guests or for arranging and reserving "house seats." After performance, if you're charging admission, you'd have to take an accounting of the box office receipts (or get one from the resident house staff).

### Plugging tasks into a Calendar

Now, your draft schedule has to fit into real dates. In the example above, the 47 project days equal seven weeks. But in a real calendar — what with holidays, weekends, birthdays, vacations, and other scheduling conflicts — the project period could stretch to three or more months, though the number of actual work days remains the same. To find out, get out your color marker, a blank calendar and your draft schedule, and take the following steps:

1. Assign a final deadline date. This is usually when the project should be finished. For your purposes, the deadline you set should be at least a

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

week in advance of the date by which you have to turn in the production. This allows for contingencies that cause unforeseen delays.

2. Block out non-work days, such as week-ends, holidays, vacation days, and quasi-holidays such as the Friday after Thanksgiving, as shown below.
3. Ascertain availabilities from studio, cast and crew; note bad times and dates in the calendar.
4. Pencil in the schedule, working backwards from the deadline. Count only working days. If, for instance, you start work on a Monday, Day 6 is not the following Saturday, it's the following Monday. Factor in time for contingencies. Work around the availability of your studio and people. Adjust boilerplate times for production convenience. If, for example, I leave two days for general auditions, and the first date falls on a Friday, I may move it to the following Monday rather than have a weekend separate the two days of the casting call.
5. Review the calendar. Figuring from today or the proposed start date, have you enough time to complete the project by deadline? Have you thought of everything? Have you made any errors? Adjust accordingly.

<b>OCTOBER</b>						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5 Finalize scripts	6	7	8	9 → schedule production meeting	10
11	12 <b>Columbus Day</b>	13 production meeting	14 script to F, S, C create breakdowns schedule generals	15 → send audition notices	16 → schedule music mtg	17
18	19 do taping ↓ schedule, tech notes	20 music meeting	21 →	22	23 →	24
25	26 ↓ take audition appointments	27	28	29 do audition materials, prep	30	31

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

(More →)

# The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

## NOVEMBER

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 generals assess auditionees	3 schedule call-backs	4 Veteran's Day	5	6 call-backs	7
8	9 review call-backs	10 schedule F & S mtgs	11 Veteran's Day	12	13	14
15	16 do production forms troubleshoot	17 meeting with S	18 meeting with F	19	20	21
22	23 read-thru	24 voice sessions	25	26 Thanks giving	27	28
29	30 up-date talent rolodex					

## DECEMBER

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 post	2 music session & mix	3	4 talent payroll	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12



## The Golden Rule of Planning and Calculated Risks

### **Yuri's Golden Rule of Planning**

*A plan with too many "ifs" is a bad plan.*

Normally, my Golden Rule of Planning should reign supreme. Remember when Driscoll heard that King Kong as climbing to the top of the Empire State Building, he thought if they could scramble some crack shot fighter pilots in a hurry, and if Kong put Ann down and if the pilots could then shoot at Kong without hitting Ann...." Sorry. Sounds like a bad plan to me. Too many "ifs." Too risky. "If we can persuade Jennifer Lopez to come here to Nome, and if the airport isn't snowed in and if the roads aren't closed and if the new sound studio is finished by then, why, we can record the show between Thanksgiving and Christmas — if Jay Lo's name is sufficient to interest backers, that is." Nope.

Well, almost always nope. At times, you may need to consider taking a calculated risk. This means weighing the possible reward from your plan's success, not against the price of failure, but the consequences of not trying at all — Not of having nothing to lose, but of your having nothing to lose worth keeping.

For instance, back in the '70s, like many non-profit arts organizations, my National Radio Theater (NRT) was barely scraping by. Raising money to meet the next round of bills dominated my time and energy while eroding my spirit. An opportunity to launch a large career-making project appeared, but it was a long shot and meant dropping everything else. The pay-off was potentially huge; failure would be devastating. Although odds were against NRT, letting the chance pass by meant continuing the soul-destroying grind of trying to make caviar productions on a McDonald's budget. I took the calculated risk. After a few anxious, poverty-stricken months of toil, NRT prevailed big time. The moral: If the possible gain is large enough, your current circumstances odious enough, and your other options (if any) unsatisfactory enough, bet on the calculated risk.

## **Oversight**

Management is largely a job of overseeing the people who actually do the work. A good manager personally handles the stuff only he or she can do and delegates the rest. Things get done more efficiently if you delegate responsibilities to capable subordinates and co-workers than if you do it yourself. Ally yourself with talented individuals who you trust to work without much supervision. At the outset, make clear their duties, deadlines, compensation and working conditions. It is easier to check up on others than to monitor yourself. Also a better use of your time as project boss. How long does it take to direct somebody to copy the scripts as opposed to copying them yourself? A no-brainer.

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

**Now, a caveat. In the '70s and '80s, I produced 15 to 30 hours of programming per year, and had to raise the money and do the marketing, promotion and distribution in-house as well. This required a small full-time staff of from three to six persons depending on the work load. Supervising the staff drained me and proved a source of perpetual irritation. The people you can afford who type, answer the phones, file and sort the mail, often as not, lack the motivation and cooperative spirit that you have every right to expect from your cast and crew. They make petty demands and try to do as little as they can get away with. Adding insult to injury, you have to pay into their FICA, workers comp and unemployment insurance.**

**Having learned to use a computer, I no longer need a full-time staff. I can do my own typing, filing and bookkeeping electronically. What I can't handle on the P.C., I out-source per job to independent contractors, thereby reducing effort, stress and expense. The best way to manage a staff is to have no staff to manage.**

### **Contracts**

**Get it in writing! Every important service should be covered in a note, email, deal memo or contract. Every arrangement should be backed-up in writing, if only to avoid misunderstanding and missed deadlines. Friends you choose to work with should be covered even more conscientiously than others, to ensure that you don't lose the friendship as well as the service. Every writing should be clear to all concerned.**

**Talent Contracts. When producing for non- or unconventional broadcast, you may employ union or non-union talent, and fix compensation and other stipulations as you and your contracting talent see fit. The union, AFTRA, has no so-called "first paragraph" provision forbidding members from working for non-signatories of the non-broadcast world. This may change. Keep current.**

**For public broadcast use, consult the current AFTRA-Public Radio Agreement, negotiated with NPR on behalf of the industry. Even when working outside AFTRA's purview, I use the talent contract in the AFTRA-Public Radio Agreement as a boilerplate for my own agreements with talent (see HANDY FORMS in the appendix below).**

**Music Rights. Be sure to secure rights to both copyrighted music and the performance, even of scores in the public domain. Recording companies are touchy about unauthorized use of their material. Nor can you be sure that the arrangement you're using of a P.D. work is itself P.D. When recording from scratch with union musicians, you must clarify with your musical contractor whether or not the musicians are or are not due royalties. AFM does not officially allow buy-outs, but gives a lot of leeway to individual contractors. Know what rights you are buying.**

**At one time, I used recorded music without clearing the rights. My stuff was being made exclusively for public radio broadcast. It was the stations' responsibility to deal with rights, not mine. To meet that responsibility, conscientious stations requested lists of all the commercial music recordings used in the productions I provided them. On behalf of all public broadcasters, National Public Radio had negotiated agreements with ASCAP and**

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BMI that extended to us program providers. These arrangements have to be renegotiated periodically. Make sure any program intended for conventional broadcast is using music in accord with prevailing licenses.

If you are commissioning original music, more than likely, your composer will also conduct and contract the musicians, if not "realize" the composition him/herself. electronically. See that whatever you pay gives you all the rights you need. Avoid having to pay royalties, even if you have to pay more up-front. Don't allowed yourself to get nickle and dimed by unexpected bills from your contractor for music copying and other incidentals.

### Cash Flows

Periodic cash flow charts show you how you're doing financially, whether you're on, under or over budget. Once you have this information, you can make adjustments, rethink how you're going to spend remaining funds. For elaborate projects taking many months, I've been known to update the cash flows I created every time I wrote a check. I have done this extra and perhaps unnecessary work because I have no head for figures. Still, it may not be a bad idea on relatively small projects if you have difficulty keeping the numbers straight. Otherwise, a monthly cash flow report ought to suffice.

Fortunately for those of us who are "numerically challenged," affordable, user-friendly software can take a lot of the pain out of managing money. You can keep your records in your computer, including your check book and ledgers, and knock out cash flow and other financial reports whenever you need them. I prefer to make my own using a spreadsheet. In a cash flow report, you only need three columns of figures for the period — the week, the month, the quarter, the year — that you're examining: one for the budget, one for actual expenditures, one the difference between budget and actual.

	JANUARY		
line items	budget	actual	difference
salaries and wages	\$10,000	\$9,750.50	\$249.50
fees	14,500	15,200.29	-700.29
materials & supplies	50	60.00	0.00
travel & subsistence	0	0.00	0.00
facilities	300	247.62	52.38
general	<u>150</u>	<u>175.00</u>	<u>-.25.00</u>
TOTAL	\$25,000	\$25496.03	\$496.03

My cash flow spreadsheets would parse annual operating or project budgets into monthly estimates. The first column would by the project or annual budget. Then would come three columns for every month. I rigged the cells so that a manual up-date of one cell could automatically update all subsequent related cells. Thereby, I could instantly link any

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

one or more adjustment to the entirety. I found this very helpful and well worth the long hours it took to create.

Making budgetary adjustments on the basis of cash flow reports is a little like locking the barn doors after the cows have escaped. Spend carefully and you'll have nothing to compensate for later.

There are numerous other financial budgets and reports you may have to deal with — for the IRS, a board of directors, a funder or sponsor, an executive producer and so on. As we are only interested here in the financial end of managing production, I think we can stop here and go on to another subject.

### **Cutting Your Losses**

No matter how good you are or want to be, you can only do your best with the resources available to you. The key to managing time, money and personnel is knowing when to cut your losses. You may want to try for some better takes, but have run to the end of the time and money available for studio work with your talent. Well, you just have to stop. Perhaps, later, if you run under time and/or money allotted for other tasks, you can schedule more production time. But, if you can't, you still have to stop and go on. It is better to turn in product that you're not totally happy with on schedule than to turn a better product in late or not at all. For, if you get a reputation for irresponsibility, you may never get another shot at the game.

# FOUR

## The Production Assistant

In the American theater, the stepping stone to a directing career is stage management. At one time, every director once worked as a stage manager. It was good training. The stage manager gets to see the interactions of director and players, and participate in an important capacity that hones one's concentration and sense of responsibility. The production assistant is the audio equivalent of the theatrical stage manager. However, the P.A. works for the producer, even though much of the job consists of assisting the director. The breadth of the P.A.s job makes the position ideal training for the aspiring audio dramatist.

The P.A. makes sure everything gets done. In my sessions at any rate, the P.A. is indispensable. In my whole career, I've only worked with one good one, Nina Callaghan at CBC, Toronto. You can't just get a gopher. You need someone with judgment and discretion. This is because the P.A.'s job is to make sure nothing interferes with the smooth progress of sessions and the concentration of the director and engineer(s). If anybody needs to have their head screwed on straight, it is the P.A.

The P.A. must appreciate the necessity for forbearance, equanimity and supportiveness in the face of flaring tempers and tense sessions. The P.A. never talks back or loses control in the studio, no matter what the provocation. Quite the opposite. If only by example, the P.A. sets the tone for coolness under pressure, cooperation, and friendliness. Male or female, the P.A. is den mother of a audio drama.

Duties vary depending on the producer's requirements. The BBC and CBC, for instance, have quite different job descriptions for their P.A.s. In Toronto, I was surprised that the P.A. even types the scripts. In London, that the P.A. refused to take notes for me. At home, being infuriatingly absent-minded, I delegate everything that requires having one's act together, namely:

### Responsibilities

#### Pre-production

##### Casting

If there is no Casting Director, you, the P.A.

- send casting notices to appropriate media.
- schedule audition appointments with talent or their agents.
- copy "sides" (script excerpts used for casting purposes) and sign-in sheets, and make sure they're in the appropriate place at the casting location.

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- sign talent in and usher at the casting calls.
- read against the actors who are auditioning, taking whatever lines the auditionee does not speak.
- schedule “call-backs” with talent the director wants to read again, and
- notify talent of the casting results.

### **Session Prep**

- Prepare, duplicate, and have executed talent contracts.
- Procure IRS withholding forms, have talent fill them out and deliver to producer or payroll person.
- Gather contact information for cast, studio, and crew, and prepare contact sheet for yourself, producer and director.
- Schedule rehearsals and sessions with all concerned parties.
- Prepare, duplicate, and send call sheets to all concerned parties.
- Duplicate scripts and/or sides and send to talent, foley walker(s), engineer(s), producer, director. You will need one yourself at the session.
- A few days prior to rehearsal or session, contact everyone who needs to be present to make sure they know when to arrive.
- Secure refreshments or catering services for sessions, as producer requests and budget allow.
- Prepare and duplicate any forms needed at the session.
- Set up an area in the studio to use as a “green room,” or actors’ lounge This is where coffee and refreshments go, or where the caterer lays out goodies.
- If needed and approved by producer, recruit a second P.A. to assist you, and supervise that person.
- Prepare and duplicate studio time forms, and
- Troubleshoot.

### **During Sessions**

- Sign talent in and out on sign-in forms (see “Forms” below).
- Fill out studio time logs and make sure that the principal session engineer signs it. And sign it yourself.
- If an actor doesn’t arrive at least 10 minutes before called, try to phone him/her for an ETA. Notify producer immediately of no-shows.

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- If the project is under union auspices, make sure breaks are observed that are required by AFTRA.
- Keep talent gathered in the green room until needed at the mike.
- Usher talent in and out of performance area quickly and efficiently as they are needed or dismissed.
- Assist the director to back-time the production.
- Hold book. This means following along in the script as the actors perform, noting any important changes or mistakes. After the take, inform the director of anything he may have to retake. Also note any changes to be retained.

### **Post-production**

- File all forms that need to be retained.
- If studio is paid by the hour, superintend “conformance” edit and maintain studio time logs as you did during voice sessions.
- Sign-in forms and studio time logs go to the producer or whomever he has delegated to write checks.
- Prepare and file production logs.
- Duplicate cassettes or CDs of the finished production for your producer’s permanent file, cast members, author, and, if requested, techies.

### **Forms**

Your producer should have dummies, blanks, or boilerplates available as masters for the various forms you need. All can be processed quickly on computer or filled in by hand. For examples, see HANDY FORMS in the Appendices below.

#### **Breakdown/Casting Notice**

This is a list of the as-yet-uncast roles with thumbnail descriptions. It may include the times, dates, and location of the casting call, or instructions on making submissions, plus the number to call for audition appointments. When you get the breakdown from the producer, get it to the casting director, if there is one. Otherwise, send it with the casting notice to the casting mailing list.

#### **Casting Calendar**

This is something to keep near the phone to schedule and log audition appointments. Set up the form for the days of the call and the start times of casting appointments. When talent calls, determine which appointment availability the talent wants and log it in.

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When making appointments, instruct talent what they need to prepare and bring. For instance, the director may want hopefuls to prepare two contrasting speeches of a specified length, and to bring mug shots and resumes.

### Casting Sheets

Talent should be seen in the order of the appointed time — except that a late arrival is shoved to the back of the line. This is a courtesy for those who arrived on time or early. In the reception area of the casting facility, keep a sign-in sheet on a clipboard in a prominent place, to which you have strung a pencil. Have extra pencils handy but out-of-sight. The original pencil will go missing sooner or later before the day ends.

If talent brings a pic and resume, gather them up for the director, to whom you give them when you escort the talent into the casting studio. When you do this ushering, make sure talent leaves sides in the reception area. Otherwise, the sides will soon go the way of your phantom pencils.

### Contracts

There are several types of contracts, but all can be handled on stock forms. Use your word-processor's merge function to knock them off.

### Sides

Typically these are scripts specially made up for casting that include only the pages needed for the audition. There may be sides for each character. Duplicate a sufficient number of sides to have sitting in the reception area of the casting facility, so that waiting hopefuls can review them. Have another bunch with you so that you can read against the auditionees. Mark sides with the name of the character(s), and black-out the lines not being used.

In long scripts with a significant number of characters, or when the play is being performed before a studio audience, the producer or director may chooses to have actors perform from sides rather than full scripts. In such a case it is your job to copy and send sides to each person.

### Call Sheets

Get information from the producer and make call sheets for the talent. Include studio phone and address, director's and producer's phone numbers, and your numbers — plus cell phones for everyone who has them. As you can see from the below example, the roles being played and the page and line numbers being recorded appear on my call sheets so

SHERLOCK HOLMES  
CALL SHEET

all players: read-through  
11am - 1pm, Monday, July 19  
location TBA

STUDIO ZERO  
14751-1/2 Oxnard St  
Van Nuys CA 91411  
(818) 903-4125

Yuri Rasovsky  
unenlightened despot  
323 662-3284  
fiendo@mailblocks.com

Tuesday, July 20				Wednesday, July 21	
players	roles	call	page/line	call	page/line
Rosalind Ayres	Smeedley			3pm - 4:30pm	79/1 - 84A
Josephine Bailey	Alice Bully	10:30am - 1:30pm 3pm - 5pm	1/2 - 24/15 31/17 - 47/6	12pm - 4:30pm	53/5 - 64/2 65/2 - 77A 79/1 - 84A
Mark Bramhall	Foman Barsick	10:30am - 5pm	1/2 - 31/15 31/17 - 43/12	10:30am - 11am 1pm - 2:30pm	48/3 - 53/3 65/2 - 77A
Kenneth Danziger	Larabee	10:30am - 3pm	1/2 - 31/15	10:30am - 1pm	48/3 - 53/3 53/5 - 64/2
Melissa Greenman	Tirere	10:30am - 1:30pm 3:30pm - 5pm	1/2 - 24/15 31/17 - 43/12		
Martin Jarvis	Holmes	12pm - 1:30pm 3pm - 5pm	13/11 - 23/6 31/17 - 47/6	11:30am - 5pm	76/17 77/5 - 14 65/2 - 77A 79/1 - 84A 77/16 - 78/12



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that talent can be fully prepared for the sessions. Your name and number are the most important, because you are the central contact person for the production.

### Contact Sheet

The contact sheet lists names and contact information of everyone involved in the sessions. Note that cell phone numbers are particularly important. You will need them to contact tardy performers during sessions. Besides yourself, give copies to the director and producer. No one else needs them.

### Sign-in Sheets

A pain in the butt, but necessary if talent is paid by the hour or by the call. You must log in when the time of arrival of each actor on separate forms. You log them out when they finish — not when they leave, mind you, but when they finish. Talent must sign the forms to acknowledge accurate reporting of their time.

### Studio Time Forms

If the studio is paid by the hour, you have to keep track of studio time expended. This means that you may have to superintend editing, at least the initial “conformance” edit, during which out-takes are removed and the good takes put in the correct order. This is to make sure that the studio doesn’t pad its bill. You log

in every coffee and meal break. Each studio time sheet — one time-sheet per day of work — should have spaces for the engineer’s and your signatures for verification of the accuracy of the time accounting. The studio should get a copy of each signed form, as well as your producer.

### Track Sheets

Even though the engineer may fill out his own track sheet, the producer may require you to note what lines are being recorded, in

PRODUCTION LOG SHEET	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;">The Speckled Band</div>	
author: SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE	
producing entity: THE HOLLYWOOD THEATRE OF THE EAR	
client or funder: BLACKSTONE AUDIOBOOKS	
in order of appearance:	
WATSON:	KIM O'HEN TREON
RODGERS:	MARC BRAMHALL
ENID:	MELISSA GREENSPAN
ALF FOREMAN/MONIVAGUE:	ANDRE SOULIERO
RYLOUT:	DAVID SCHAEZ
CORONER/MILVERSON:	NICHOL DANDLER
ADVANTAGE:	WIMBORNE SHERPARD
WILSON/LONING:	PHILIP PROCTOR
MRS STANBORN:	ROSEMARY AUBREY
BILLY/MRS SOMMES:	JOSEPHINE BAILEY
HOLMES:	NAVIS
producer/director: YURI RASOVSEY	
engineer: JOHN BAKER	
story: TOM PIZZINO	
sign: public domain	
production	final broadcast/release
	final publication

CUE SHEET	
Craven Street	
Episode One	
Act One	
Cue in: "The following program is made possible in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities."	
Length: 29:31	
Cue out: "American Dialogues Radio will return with Craven Street, after this brief pause."	
60 seconds of silence	
Act Two	
Cue in: "And now, the conclusion of Craven Street."	
Length: 28:29	
Cue out: "This has been a production of American Dialogues Radio, and I am Robert Foxworth."	

## **The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist**

**what order, on which tape or DAT or CD, and on what tracks. You will use the producer's track sheets rather than the studio's. The director may even ask you to show which takes are keepers and which are not, and make other helpful notes. It is essential that you make scrupulously accurate notes.**

### **Production Logs**

**Logs preserving all important production information belong in your producer's permanent file. Fill one out and after the production is in final form. Some of the information you need will only be available after the post. Other data, such as the broadcast or publication dates, may only become known many months after you have gone on to bigger and better things.**

### **Cue Sheets**

**For networks or stations broadcasting the production.**

# FIVE

## The Text

For convenience, I am here addressing the radio theater writer, but I don't mean to suggest that producers, directors, and talent should skip this information. The issues covered here bear upon all creative contributors to audio drama. While writing ability is not required of producers, directors and actors, playwrighting lore is. They must analyze or edit scripts as part of their jobs. Analyzing the script to uncover its values is their first step when preparing for production.

In passing, it is worth noting that the converse is true, too. To best understand their job, writers should act, produce, and direct. Greek tragedians directed and choreographed their own plays. Two of Europe's greatest playwrights, Shakespeare and Molière, were actors. The two most famous radio dramatists of the Golden Age, Norman Corwin and Arch Oboler, produced, directed, and performed as well as wrote. Three of the most noteworthy American radio dramatists of recent years — expatriate Roger Gregg, Erik Bauersfeld, and Tom Lopez — produce and direct their own writings. Erik, our better known colleague David Ossman, and I are professional actors. You are writing for performance, which you can't possibly understand unless you experience it.

Plays show characters talking and performing actions. The dialogue and actions are not random, but are connected and lead to something. Your task as script writer is to draw believable and interesting characters, give them suitable dialogue, and shape their words and deeds into a plot.

The way you accomplish these tasks depends on the audience you anticipate, the effects you wish to achieve, and the tools of the medium you're writing for. You can draw on any number of devices common to all literature, which are too numerous to discuss here. Other effects such as character, dialogue, structure, and the medium, I will take up more or less in order.

Before doing so, I want to mention two related commonplaces of creative writing bearing upon all facets of playwrighting:

**Show don't tell.** Whatever you want to have emotional impact should be acted out rather than merely spoken about. The audience has difficulty experiencing anything it does not witness. The rule isn't inviolable. Break it if showing the action would:

- be too revolting or shocking for the audience to bear;
- have less power than whatever the audience can imagine;
- overpower some other more important action, or
- unduly precipitate, retard, or completely interrupt the dramatic flow.

**Never say anything directly that you can say indirectly.** This maxim has two applications:

- 1) Don't gloss your own work. Actions explain themselves. To point a moral in so many words is redundant. Implicit values carry more impact than

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

explicit ones. The audience gains a more personal and intimate appreciation of your play when you let it make its own inferences.

- 2) At times, the best way to bring ideas home is to express them figuratively — that is, in terms of something else. Tropes (figures of speech) and verbal images are useful for rendering abstractions tangible, drabness colorful, obscurities familiar, and vagueness sharp. The radio dramatist's lexicon defines such common tropes as metaphor, metonymy, oxymoron, periphrasis, personification, portmanteau words, simile, symbol, and synecdoche.

## **Dramatic Writing**

### **Characterization**

Characters are created by giving them personalities. It should go without saying that all fictional persons should have personalities. In practice, however, it's easy to neglect supporting and walk-on characters. Performing a play with one or more flat characters is like driving a car with one or more flat tires. Those who dominate the stage should be more fully developed than those who don't, but all deserve attention.

When principals are specimens of i) types, ii) conventional personalities found in nature, or iii) symbolize abstract values — e.g., good and evil — they must still exhibit individuality. Otherwise, they will devolve into hackneyed representations or stereotypes. When characters are insufficiently differentiated, they are said to be one-dimensional. When they seem living, breathing human beings, they are called three-dimensional.

Three-dimensional characters seem full and real. To define characters coherently, you must emphasize or exaggerate some of their traits, suppress or ignore others, and make them more consistent than real-life persons. You cannot hope to shape the complexities and contradictions of truly realistic characters in a few minutes' or a few hours' playing time.

As a practical matter of script writing, you may not want to develop them, even if you could. Good actors play the personalities you have written, to which they will contribute resonances of their own individuality. Star actors can't always portray anybody but themselves. Meanwhile, producers may have to snap up the biggest names they can get, regardless of the qualities required for the role. Therefore, you may choose to delineate principals only in the broadest outlines so that they can be filled in with the personalities of whomever the producer is able to cast in the roles.

When, on the other hand, you insist upon animating your own fictional creations, you are well-advised to give them dimension. What exactly does this mean? Three-dimensional characters are those fictional persons of whom the audience gains some intimate and fundamental acquaintance by the end of the play. You can facilitate this intimacy in four ways:

- by giving the characters some inner life (psychology, emotions, thoughts) and background (genetic inheritance, nationality, history, milieu), that the audience can infer from their words and deeds;

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- by showing their outward signs of individuality — quirks, foibles, ticks, and especially their unique ways of speaking;
- by making the issues at stake for them significant and palpably manifesting the moral, emotional, psychological, and material consequences;
- by revealing more information about these things to the audience than the characters themselves know or are capable of knowing.

Rostand's fictional Cyrano de Bergerac (there was a nonfictional one) is a very full and complex character. He has a rich and complex inner life. He's a Basque and therefore, the author suggests, earthy, emotional, bellicose, courageous, chivalrous and poetic. He has been indoctrinated in the values of a shame culture. He also possesses depth of feeling, loyalty, cleverness, and a poetic soul. The salient outward sign of his individuality is a physical deformity, which exacerbates an ego disorder. This in turn makes him arrogant, hyper-sensitive, sexually anxious, quixotic, and obsessive about what he calls his "white plume" of freedom.

We see him contend with fundamental issues of fame and obscurity, wealth and poverty, love and denial, fulfillment and disappointment, life and death. In the last act, we see the consequences of these contentions in his appearance: the rags he wears, the cane he must now lean on, a fresh white plume incongruously cocked in his battered old hat. Although he dominates the play, we see more than he does — the cadets' egging Christian on to a confrontation with Cyrano in the bake shop, Christian's self-destructive resolution at Arras, Roxane's several *tête-à-têtes* with de Guiche. And while he is very aware of some of his own faults and strengths, he is incapable of appreciating what the audience realizes — that he is lovable.

There are three ways to reveal character:

- Your characters, as stated above, can reveal themselves via their own words and deeds. In *Cyrano*, the playwright shows Cyrano protecting his friends, dueling, versifying, risking his life, wooing, throwing his opportunities away on points of honor, stumbling in front of women, and otherwise displaying facets of his complex personality.
- The audience can learn something from other characters' assessments. Thus, Count de Guiche tellingly admits his envy of his enemy Cyrano, saying: "Yes, I know I have all; / He has nothing. Nevertheless, today / I should be proud to shake his hand . . ." (The Brian Hooker translation.)
- You can introduce contrasting characters, or foils, whose mere presence places other personalities in high relief. Cyrano's practical friend Le Bret contrasts Cyrano's dash and idealism; Ragueneau, the big-hearted poet-manqué, contrasts Cyrano's dynamism and poetic genius; Christian is handsome and callow where Cyrano is ugly and deep; de Guiche is rich, selfish and corrupt where Cyrano is poor, generous, and honorable.

Besides the foil, it is helpful to distinguish two other types of characters by the function they serve in the drama — the protagonist and the antagonist.

A script may contain more than one protagonist, but three or more tend to divide the audience's focus, unless you make a group or community the collective protagonist. We tend to

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think of protagonists as "good guys," or heroes, like Cyrano. But they can be anti-heroes as well — either good but weak like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, morally ambivalent like Peer Gynt, or totally evil like Shakespeare's Richard III.

For protagonists to keep the audience involved in their welfare, they must:

- be so endearing that the audience becomes infatuated with them;
- be so admirable or so express the audience's wish-fulfillment fantasies that the audience comes to hero worship them;
- so embody the audience's anxieties and self-image that the audience identifies with them and says to itself, "There for the grace of God go I," and/or
- so stimulate the public taste for voyeuristic and vicarious sensation as to exert a kind of (perverse) fascination on the audience, as do Shakespeare's Richard III and Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.

Cyrano's cleverness and kindness endear him to audiences, his courage and integrity render him admirable, and audiences identify with his vulnerabilities. His involvement in intrigues, duels, battles, and love affairs provide no dearth of vicarious thrills.

In drama, antagonists outnumber protagonists, probably because the audience can better sympathize with and admire a hero when he's ganged-up-on. We commonly think of antagonists as bad guys, but they don't have to be morally opposed to their adversaries, the way de Guiche is to Cyrano. However, when human or animal (antagonists can be forces of nature), they must act according to objectives that clash with the protagonist's. Christian is a good man, but his amorous objectives make him Cyrano's rival.

## Motivation and Meaning

Every character at every moment of every scene must have an objective. Every action, every pronouncement must be motivated. Without objectives, they'd have no reason to interact, or do anything else for that matter. A lowly herald with one measly line has to have some motivation for delivering it, if it's only to earn a living as a professional messenger. Some critics say that motivation defines character. I'm not sure I'd go quite that far, but I will say this:

In a play, you don't describe characters to the audience, you reveal them in action. If they don't act, the audience can't get to know them. Unless you motivate them, they cannot act, except as epileptics or schizophrenics; it's impossible to get to know somebody who's either throwing a fit or comatose. To be revealing, action has to mean something. Motivation gives action meaning. Insufficiently or improbably motivated action is absurd.

There comes a point in the performance of every play when the audience asks itself, "What the hell am I doing here?" It's your job as writer to head the question off at the pass and answer it before it's posed. It's more effective to weave the answer into the fabric of your script than to pin to the cloth a label proclaiming AUTHOR'S MESSAGE. Meaning is implicit in motivation. The factors that drive the characters (love, fear, sex, hunger, death, greed, honor, status, etc.) also drive your audience. The characters you portray comment by their very existence on the audience.

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As you write, the reasons why your characters do things may be no more apparent to you than to them. To test motivation, ask yourself, "Are they doing this because they want to, or because I want them to?"

### Subtext

Motivation and meaning are implicit in characters' pronouncements, though rarely explicit. The underlying significance, or subtext, may be apparent to one or more of the characters. More often than not, the characters do not grasp the subtext entirely or at all. They are acting/reacting spontaneously, trying to fool each other or themselves, assuming understanding, only groping for understanding, or incapable of understanding. Rarely do people completely and openly express what they're driving at. Like many of the values in a production, the audience need not gain a conscious understanding of the subtext to appreciate it. But the director and players do need to understand, because they can't play what they don't know is there.

Sometimes the entire purport of the action lies in the subtext. No dramatic movement occurs without it being played. For instance, at one point in Harold Pinter's early radio play, *A Slight Ache*, Flora invites a mute stranger to visit her garden. Outwardly innocent, her dialogue is, between the lines, a sexual invitation.

FLORA. I want to show you my garden. You must see my japonica, my convolvulus ... my honeysuckle, my clematis.

These lines are funny and menacing when the subtext is played; they're a big "So what?" when it isn't.

### Dialogue

Physical actions have subtext (*e.g.*, "body language"), but dialogue is the primary carrier. In audio drama, mostly what characters do is talk. The primacy of dialogue in audio drama doesn't necessarily make audio drama talky. Talkiness, an inertia of language, arises less from an excess of words than from a deficiency in their employment.

Dialogue should:

- express the characters' background, personality, mental & emotional states, mentation, and fluency - unless there's an explanatory factor in their backgrounds, characters can't speak like cavemen at one moment and Oxford dons the next;
- collectively bespeak the fictional world you have created. In Shakespeare's fictional world, low characters speak in a colloquial prose and noble characters speak in blank verse. The characters in the fictive Paris of Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*, spew out the bacchanalian rhetoric of the French Revolution.
- serve some structural function, shed light on the characters and action, and/or ornament the play;
- appropriately communicate the weight, tone, period and style of the play; the same diction (choice of words) and syntax (arrangement of words) may not equally serve comedy and tragedy; wit and farce; "slice of life" naturalism and poetic stylization; an ancient Roman setting and a contemporary American one;

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- consist of sonorities and phrasings that facilitate oral delivery and that, if not actually pleasant to the ear, are at least painless.

Just as fictional persons only resemble real ones, their dialogue only resembles real speech. Dramatic discourse is heightened discourse - direct, precise, smooth, lean, logical, dynamic, and characteristic; whereas the spontaneous, natural article is periphrastic, redundant, digressive, vague, hesitant, disjointed, bland and generic. In the course of daily life you will pick up - and may, like Bernard Shaw and others, carry a notebook with you to jot down - interesting or typical modes of expression, perhaps entire conversations. To make dialogue out of your notes, however, you will have to compress or otherwise edit it to make it particularly characteristic and logical.

## Plotting and Structure

The taller and more elaborate the building, the more support it needs from bolts and girders. The longer and more complex the play, the more support it needs from structure. This means stronger structure, not necessarily more structure. Over-plotting is a hazard. When there is too much incident, the play can become "bogged down in story" — that is, made confusing and boring by complexities and explanations.

Under-plotting can also destroy momentum. When action doesn't move in any particular direction, for dramatic purposes it might as well not move at all. Action can drone as well as sound, and is just as exciting when it does.

Drama, whether serious or comic, tells a story. So do a novel and a news report. They may tell the same story, but in different ways. The news report will arrange the facts so that the most important float to the top and the least sink to the bottom. A novel may proceed discursively from beginning to end with many diversions along the way. A play, being far shorter and therefore more direct than a novel, will begin as close to the big moments as possible (*in medias res*), and will simplify, combine and telescope events and characters to achieve the most direct route to the ending. This structuring a story into a work is called plotting; the arrangement of chronological incidents is the plot.

**Story:** (Greek myth) The Delphic Oracle tells Laius, king of Thebes, that his son will grow up to kill him. To prevent this, Laius orders the infant exposed in the wilderness. The vassal entrusted with the deed cannot bring himself to do it. Instead he gives the baby to the childless king and queen of Corinth, who name him Oedipus. Oedipus grows up thinking himself their son; hearing a prophesy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, he flees Corinth. He sets out for Thebes, where a monster called the Sphinx is menacing the city. On his way, he becomes embroiled in a fight with strangers and slays them, not knowing Laius was among them. He goes on to vanquish the Sphinx. The grateful Thebans vote him king and give him Laius's widow, Jocasta, as wife. Oedipus and Jocasta live happily until a plague strikes Athens. The Oracle informs Oedipus that if he finds and punishes Laius's murderer, the gods will lift the plague. In the course of his investigations, Oedipus discovers his own patricidal and incestuous responsibility for the plague. In horror, Jocasta commits suicide, and Oedipus blinds himself. He then sentences himself to exile, a terrible punishment in those days, and starts wandering the Grecian world with his sister-daughter Antigone. Eventually he finds sanctuary in Colonus, where he dies under portentous circumstances.



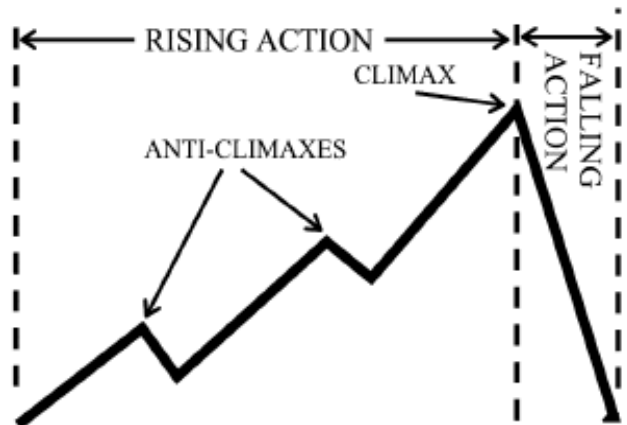
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**Plot:** Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King* is set before Oedipus' palace doors on the fateful day he learns of his unwitting patricide and incest. At curtain rise, a delegation of Theban elders appears to beseech the protagonist to do something about the plague. Oedipus tells them that he has already sent his brother-in-law Creon to the Oracle. Just then Creon returns to report that Laius's murderer must be brought to justice. Oedipus vows to do so. After a few hours of relentless probing, the awful truth comes out, Jocasta kills herself, and Oedipus has poked out his own eyes. Creon enters and restores order. He wants to ask the Oracle what to do with Oedipus, but when Oedipus insists upon exile, Creon sends him on his way.

A play may contain subordinate, parallel, or sub-plots that follow the same general flow as and that support the main plot. Shakespeare used multiple plots in several ways. In *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* the tribulations of four young lovers, the attempt of some simple workmen to rehearse a play, and a marital tiff between the fairy queen and king become enmeshed in the Athenian woods one night. In the two *Henry IV* plays, the grim doings at court are relieved and contrasted by the droll carousing of Prince Hal and Falstaff. Gloucester's suffering at the hands of his bastard son parallels and illuminates King Lear's suffering at the hands of his daughters.

### Structural Elements

More than any other form of literature, drama depends for effect on the orchestration of tension and conflict. Tension keeps mounting to a peak or major crisis, at which point a reversal, or peripety, occurs, accompanied by an emotional outpouring, or climax, which releases the tension. Pressure dissipates to a level of equilibrium, and the play ends. The action preceding and building to the climax is often referred to as the rising action, and that which follows, the falling action.



Any occurrence in the play is considered an action. Some action necessarily occurs off-stage, because it is too ghastly or complicated or time consuming to show on stage, or because you can achieve a particular effect that way. The only way to manifest off-stage doings is through narrative — that is, by describing what happened. Sometimes neither acting out events nor merely describing them suffices. In that event, you can employ a unified sequence of partial scenes, documentary style.

Deciding what to show fully, what to show partially, what to narrate, what to suppress, where to begin, and where to end constitutes your most difficult problem as a playwright. You may find that you have so arranged things as to require an obligatory scene, without which your audience will feel disappointed or cheated. You can also find the opposite, that you have some beautifully written scene or speech or bit of business that just gets in the way and has to go. These decisions depend upon technical factors, taste, and most of all, the pace or dramatic flow required to propel, retard, deflect, or deter the action toward the climax.

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The more a play sprawls, the more diversions and digressions it contains, the more diffuse the tension and the harder it is to build momentum. For this reason, you may want to begin your plays *in medias res*, "in the middle of things." Begin as close to the climax as possible, introducing past events in retrospect, through exposition, narration, or flashbacks.

On the other hand, you may also wish to build tension by purposely withholding the climax to the last possible minute. Doing so creates suspense, a kind of anxious anticipation that mounts when a playwright makes an audience expect a crucial happening momentarily and then delays the occurrence: a waiting for the other shoe to drop. Such a hold or delay is called a stage wait.

Like too much excitement during intercourse, too much emotional excitement in a play may cause a premature explosion. To retard its occurrence, you may have to release some of the pressure at key points. This is one purpose of anticlimaxes. You can also regulate tension with comic relief, so that the audience can laugh off a little steam.

In addition to halting the momentum and letting some of it dissipate, you can control its speed. The simplest way to accomplish this is to start slow and gradually keep picking up steam until the climax hits, then turn off the juice, so to speak, and let the play glide to the end. With practice, you can get very sophisticated with this, speeding up, slowing down, speeding up again, altering rhythms, etc., as long as you don't lose the sense of movement entirely for very long.

Action that advances the plot is called dramatic action. Often, the curtain goes up before the dramatic action begins. Before you can get the ball rolling or let it roll too far, you must somehow "set the scene," deliver the background information, or exposition, that the audience needs before it can follow the plot. Some exposition may be delayed for the sake of getting a move on, while some may belong only at the end, as when, after the climactic revelation of the guilty party, the detective explains how he discovered the culprit.

Shortly after you dispose of the exposition, a conflict is introduced. Tension mounts through a series of complications, each arising out of the basic conflict, that force matters to a head. Some catalyst is often necessary to drive the tension to climax, after which consequences manifest themselves and loose ends are quickly tied up. Because audience interest falls as the action falls, the climax usually occurs close to the end of the play. Minor crises and high points or anticlimaxes may hit before the main climax, like landings on a staircase. Anticlimaxes appearing after the main climax tend to weaken the entire play and are therefore discouraged. For this reason, people speak of any occurrence that seems trivial when following a particularly sensational one as *anticlimactic*.

The play does not usually end at the moment the dramatic action hits the finish line. Corpses may litter the stage and everything may have been said, but you need something strong with which to send the audience home. You will have to come up with a curtain line that has the right note of finality. In fact, if you want the audience to return after intermission, you may want a good, suspenseful curtain line at the end of the first act.

### A Very Good Example

To exemplify these principles, let's return to Sophocles, who had to write within the boundaries of the highly stereotyped structure of the ancient Greek theater. Tragedies weren't

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divided into acts, but into episodes, each separated by an ode chanted and danced by a chorus. They often began with an introductory speech or scene of exposition, followed by a formal entrance of the chorus. Once on, the chorus stayed until the dramatic action spun out. Its formal exit ended the play. Subject matter was restricted to historical or mythological stories already familiar to the audience, though in treating the story, playwrights were allowed considerable license.

In *Oedipus the King*, the chorus of elders quickly and anxiously delivers the exposition and sets up the conflict: there's a plague, Oedipus was a stranger when he saved the town years ago from the Sphinx, can he not save it again now that he is the king and the fate of the city is in his hands?

Immediately thereafter, the first complication is introduced when Creon narrates the intelligence he received from the Oracle. His investigation is further complicated when the blind seer Teiresias refuses to divulge what he knows, which is apparently everything, and warns Oedipus against probing too far. These opening episodes contain their own anticlimaxes, each episode leads logically to the next, and — as befits a good detective story — the exposition comes little by little as the episodes progress.

Sophocles ends each episode at a high point that whets the spectators' expectations for the following action. The first closes when he vows to get to the bottom of the mystery, the second with Teiresias' warning, the third as Oedipus accuses Creon of sedition, etc. In this way, he keeps tension hanging in mid-air during the choral odes, which function as stage waits.

The play proceeds in this way until the climax when Oedipus learns the truth. On the way, tension mounts inexorably and suspensefully as the hero gets closer and closer to unraveling the mystery, never suspecting what the audience already knows, that he is the murderer he seeks. The revelation brings on Oedipus's ultimate crisis: How will he deal with his own guilt? Overcome, he rushes madly into the palace.

Another ode keeps the audience on pins and needles until an eye-witness staggers out of the palace and reveals the off-stage violence. Although the climax has hit off-stage, the eloquent narrator communicates the full horror of it. In so doing, he sets up Oedipus's final entrance, in which he appears at the door of the palace, standing over Jocasta's body blood streaming down his face. The situation demands some expression of his feelings at that moment, an obligatory scene. Sophocles delivers it in the form of a contrapuntal lament between Oedipus and the compassionate elders. Thus the action begins to fall.

Creon arrives, restores order, and gently sends Oedipus into exile. All the loose ends are now tied up, the dramatic action is over, but not the play. Sophocles has to get everybody off-stage. Creon ushers Oedipus back into the palace. With the royal family gone and the palace door shut, there's no reason for the petitioners to stick around, so they leave too, delivering this gloomy curtain line:

People of Thebes, behold ye Oedipus, solver of riddles, man of power! Which one of us did not envy his good fortune? See what storms beset him now! Learn by this to call no one fortunate until he has gone from womb to grave untainted by pain.

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Sophocles employed a tragic structure — that is, everything seemed to go well for the hero until the climax, when his fortunes took a startling turn for the worse. Conversely, everything can go badly for the hero until the climax, which brings about a turn for the better. This is called comic structure. Comic and tragic structures bolster melodrama, the most common dramatic form in broadcasting, about which more below.

There are many variations and mixtures of comic and tragic plotting, and many ways to structure plays that are neither comic nor tragic. The design of your play will often emerge from the themes and characters. All structures involve the coherent orchestration of tension and conflict — progression and unity, of events leading somewhere, arriving, and resolving — of beginning, middle and end, of wholeness. If nothing much changes for the characters, something must change for the audience; it must leave with a better understanding of your characters and situations than it came in with.

### **Variety and Contrast**

Contrasting and complimentary touches are just as important as plot points. You can indeed hold a play together with variety and invention alone. Didi and Gogo, the protagonists of Samuel Beckett's best-known tragicomedy, are waiting for something significant to happen; they are waiting for Godot, who will somehow bring relief from their miserable existence. But he never shows. When the audience is sufficiently impressed with the doleful futility of the vigil, the play ends.

Until then, Beckett can't let much of anything happen to Didi and Gogo, but he has to keep the audience involved without the help of a plot, of "incidence." He resorts to a brilliant mixture of broad physical humor and verbal pyrotechnics. What little formal structure comes from the suspense of Didi and Gogo's vigil. Will he come? won't he? why will he? why may he not? if he comes, when will he arrive? what is at stake?

It may help you, as it does me, to think of the orchestration of contrasting and complementary elements in terms of a variety bill. Variety shows have no plots, but the elements and numbers are arranged to hold an audience. The strongest is last, partly so that the audience leaves the theater on an up-note and partly to prevent the law of diminishing returns from setting in. The next strongest ends the first act, so that the audience will stick around after the intermission. The third strongest begins the first act to put the audience in a receptive mood, and the fourth begins the second act for much the same reason. The weakest element is second on the bill.

In the middle of both acts appear some spectacular "turn," fast-paced, dazzling, or just plain loud. Two very similar acts are never placed back-to-back. Something slow is placed next to something fast, something loud next to something quiet, a ballad to a march, a solo to an ensemble number, something comic to something serious, etc. Great care is taken about placing something serious next to something funny. If the contrast is not perfect, the funny turn will trivialize the serious one, or the heavy skit spoil the humor in the light one.

A sophisticated amplification of these principles occurs in symphonic music. I have neither the vocabulary nor space to go into the subject here. The omission does not imply inconsequence. As an audio dramatist, I have benefited more from the little I know of music theory than from my greater familiarity with drama and theater.

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Before leaving this subject, let me note that individual scenes and parts of scenes possess their own tone and atmosphere, but so does the play as a whole. The contrasting, varied elements must complement one another and feel of-a-piece with the play as a whole. In this regard, it's instructive to study the way Shakespeare employs humor in otherwise serious plays such as both parts of *Henry IV* and *Macbeth*. You'd think Falstaff's low comedy in prose would clash with the high-toned verse opined by the movers and shakers of Prince Hal's world. But it doesn't. Why not? How has the playwright made pratfalls, puns and practical jokes part and parcel of a story of ambition and power politics? Discover the answers for yourself and use them in your writing.

### Structural Integrity

Normally, the twists and turns of the plot ought to arise from the natural interactions of the characters as influenced by their circumstances and environment. When they do, they are said to be organic. If a play is an organic whole, you can extrapolate a premise from it, an impression of the moral and natural laws governing the play's fictional world: virtue is always rewarded, Martians eat Earthlings, fate is inescapable, gods interest themselves in human affairs, love conquers all, etc. These laws give the fictional world definition, significance, unity, and integrity.

The audience doesn't have to bother investigating these laws to appreciate the play, as long as it can infer their presence. In fact, you may not be aware of them while you're writing, because they're implicit in your imagination. When your audience says "What the hell just happened?" or "What is that writer driving at?" or "Give me a break!" your premise is either too esoteric or corrupted. You may have to state your premise in so many words at the beginning of the play, and edit so that, even with the statement, it is implicit throughout. The work's organic integrity may have been infected with an arbitrary virus.

Characters, circumstances, and environment may invite the arbitrary, and the hack writer looking for a crutch will snap at the bait. Witness the surfeit of lunatics on television. Maniacs are capable of anything, especially anything handy for the playwright's purposes. The environment or situations can be insane, as when characters go on quests, land on distant planets, or otherwise stumble into various wonderlands. The atomic bomb has been a godsend for monster mongers, for who knows what anomalies can result from radiation poisoning.

The usual reason — an unsatisfactory one — for capriciousness is convenience. The plot isn't going anywhere. The crisis has gone as far as it can go but can't be resolved. A happy ending is desired but the situation won't yield one. Somebody who has no reason to move must leave or enter for the plot to advance. So the playwright introduces a new element out of left field, which has nothing to do with what preceded. The cavalry arrives just in time, the ruthless villain repents, an idea strikes the hero, the maid chances to wander in and overhear the conspirators, the wizard finds just the right potion, the contending parties discover that they're long-lost relatives.

In some Greek tragedies, when affairs got hopelessly muddled, an actor representing a god was lowered from a machine to straighten things out. An arbitrary plot device is still called a *deus ex machina*, or 'god out of the machine.' A *deus ex machina* is not always a crutch. It can produce powerful affects when introduced for irony. In Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, Queen Victoria's messenger gallops up with a pardon just as Macheath is about to be hanged. The playwright introduced the messenger to make a sardonic point. "How nice everything would be if these saviors on horseback always appeared when they were needed," someone says.

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I remember reading Carl Barks's "Uncle Scrooge" comic books from the early '50s. At moments of crisis, Hewey, Dewey, and Lewey would pull out their copy of the *Junior Woodchuck's Guidebook*, in which they'd always find a solution. The very silliness of this *deus ex machina* became a running gag amplifying one of the more comforting natural laws of the Disney universe: kids have more sense and more imagination than adults.

Whether a plot element appears organic or not often depends on preparation. You need to set up every important plot, character, and thematic element properly, even a surprise ending. When you want listeners to remember anything important — a name, a plot point — find some way to introduce it and reinforce it at least two additional times before the crucial point. Establish the premise at the outset and keep it operative.

### Genre Writing

Genre writing is the bread-and-butter of commercial drama, including TV, radio, cinema, and the popular theater. It means writing to an established formula. Greek tragedy is just as formulaic, or more so, than a TV cop show. But, whereas the Attic drama arose from and retained aspects of religious ritual, shoot-em-ups arose to respond to two commercial needs: success and volume.

(Scene: A meeting of the creative team in the Big Mogul's office.)

MOGUL: Kids, we got a lot at stake here. To even the odds against failure, me and the bankers took a good look at things that have proved boffo in the past. We boiled 'em down to the bottom line. Here are the equations. It's up to you to do the math.

WRITERS AND DIRECTORS: Brilliant, B.M.! We gotta knock out twenty-six to thirty-nine hours and we were worried just how we were gonna do that. By reducing the job to tenth grade algebra, you've made our job a piece of cake.

TROUBLEMAKER: But what about creativity, innovation, and stuff?

MOGUL: The public don't want creativity and innovation. They want to know what to expect. If they liked last week's show, they want to get more of the same on next week's show, not somethin' totally different.

SEASONED OLD PRO: (aside to Troublemaker) Don't worry, kid. Even in algebra there's room for maneuvering. Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere — they all wrote to formula. Stay within the bounds and you can be as creative as you want. Just don't make a point of it with B.M. or he'll squash it. Say nothing and he won't notice.

Most genre writing proceeds from this sort of rationale. The most common forms you're likely to encounter in radio:

**The Serial.** A drama in which continuity and plot are stretched over a number of discrete episodes. To entice the audience to return for the next program, episodes typically end on some suspenseful note, a "cliff-hanger." I distinguish between three overlapping types:

**Soap operas**, or "soaps," are far looser than full-length plays. Several melodramatic plots of equal importance may unfold simultaneously, though starting and ending in different places in never-ending cycles. Audiences seem to care far more about the Who and the How than the What. Moments are far more important than any consequence. Multiple issues of great importance are always looming over the characters. Suspense is unrelenting. Yet the plots creep forward as if burdened with a great weight. Most fans can't tune in every single day, though most try, and the viscosity of development prevents

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them from missing too much. (One radio serial kept a character riding in an elevator for several months.) No climax may ever appear. A stream of story line may just peter out, but it makes little difference when other estuaries continue flowing imperviously along.

**Adventure serials** or cliff-hangers may build little tension from one episode to the next. Each installment has to be relatively short, because without real development the law of diminishing returns soon sets in. Cliff-hangers depend on non-stop action to keep the audience interested. Forces of good and evil thwart each other in single-file encounters. Episodes could continue indefinitely and, when they do end, end arbitrarily. All but the last episode ends with a life and death situation suspended in doubt. The BBC's popular *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a distinguished modern example.

**Dramatic novels** (my name for them), or miniseries, such as *Upstairs Downstairs* or my own *Craven Street*, strive for depth of characterization and a concomitant structural sophistication. Each episode has its own dramatic design and reaches its own climax while contributing to the overall dramatic design. The climax to the whole series comes in the last or next to last episode.

In addition to suspenseful episode endings, serials share another trait. All but the first episode begin with a summary, or recap, of the previous episode's action. The recap may be narrated or worked somehow into the action. When the plots are particularly convoluted and the serial particularly long, the entire story thus far may be recapped periodically.

**Anthologies.** Broadcast series of dramatic programs, in which plots and characters change from episode to episode. There is usually one or more unifying element - a recurring program host who introduces each program, a common theme (e.g., horror, mystery, love, saving souls), a common author, a common formula, or even a common origin. All programs may share formulaic length, breaks, and billboards; otherwise, no common structure may be present.

**Episodics.** Any regularly scheduled dramatic broadcast series of self-contained episodes. Either there are continuing lead characters, or some stylistic or thematic continuity (e.g., *Twilight Zone*). In commercial television, every dramatic series that isn't a sitcom or serial is an episodic. Like serials, they are melodrama. Like sitcoms, they don't waste much time on exposition or variety, as fans can be counted on to remember and demand the same premise, principals, milieu, and situations from show to show.

**Melodrama.** The overwhelming majority of broadcast dramas are melodramas. In melodrama, characters personifying good combat characters of forces personifying evil. Conflicts within a character are rare. If characters do grow and change, they only gain an appreciation of some commonplace value. Melodramatic situations are black and white, violent, sensational, and far-fetched struggles against death, exploitation, physical pain, bondage and physical or moral corruption. Novelty is achieved through exoticism; otherwise plots and characters are highly stereotyped. Kessey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a powerful example. Bad examples proliferate on prime-time television.

**Sitcoms.** Dramatic broadcast series of humorous programs, in which recurring leads cavort in self-contained episodes. The action occurs primarily in recurring locales and

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

revolves around domestic or other mundane situations. Matters of life and death rarely enter in. The overwhelming majority of sitcoms are farce, a comedy of discomfiture and humiliation, or slapstick, a comedy of physical assault. Humans are shown as comically flawed, but endearing, and fate is kind. Sentimentality is frequently present.

Less stringently formulaic patterns can also be classified by genre. Defined in the lexicon are comedy, docudrama, drama (see sense 2), farce, problem play, romance, satire, situation comedy (not the same as sitcom), and tragedy (reputedly, the most profound form of Western drama, and maybe Western literature).

## **Audio Drama**

### **Time Formats**

As with script writing in other media, you often must conform to conventional time formats. In America, features for commercial broadcasters may be as short as one minute. Non-commercial programs tend to hug the hour and half-hour. When writing for non-broadcast, you should work within the lengths of the transmission medium: 15, 30, and 45 minutes per side of an analogue cassette, a continuous hour on a CD, possibly longer on a DAT, etc.

Broadcast half-hours and hours are 29 and 59 minutes long, respectively, including wrap-arounds, commercial and I.D. breaks, and other announcements. Many stations currently run news on the hour, which may diminish the program air time by an additional five minutes. Your play gets whatever is left over after all these subtractions.

Nonetheless, write long. You cannot time a script precisely as you write. If the script runs long, it can be cut, but if it runs short, what will the producer fill with? It is, therefore, common to write a little over the time allotted, to include dialogue that the producer can cut without doing damage.



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## **Duration**

Concentrating fatigues audiences. Dramatists often write to prescribed lengths that take audience fatigue into consideration. Playwrights program at least one act-break in a full-length play to give the audience a stretch. They know that the audience will probably have less tolerance after the break than before, so they ring down the first act curtain a little more than half-way through. When the length requires more than one intermission, each act and each intermission will be shorter than the one before.

The same principles apply in audio drama. Audio plays take more concentration than stage plays, television, and movies. Unless the material is very special, American listeners can withstand no more than an hour of playing time. Even when no commercial or station breaks are required, interrupt the action just past the half-hour. The longest act leads, the shortest concludes.

## **Production Conditions**

Time formats change. Transmission media change. Conditions affecting the length and frequency of breaks change. Script requirements change with them. The writer has the responsibility for keeping up with these things, accommodating current formats, programming in break points as needed, and otherwise writing for real production conditions.

You should call for special effects only when you have some idea that they can be done. You cannot cop out with a cue such as

SOUND: SNOW FALLING.

. . . or. . .

THE SHIP BLOWS UP. PANDEMONIUM. EVERYONE RUSHES TO THE LIFEBOATS AND FIGHTS OVER THE SPACES. THE SHIP SINKS BEFORE ANY CAN BE LAUNCHED AND ALL ARE KILLED.

. . . and leave to the producer the task of figuring out how to do it.

Writing for broadcast requires a sensitive handling of controversial language and subject matter. Audiences take offense more readily when listening to the radio than when listening to recordings. You should also assume that an economy of means is required, unless you are informed definitely to the contrary.

## **Conventions**

American radio dramatists in the '30s and '40s developed a number of handy conventions that are still useful, if not indispensable, to the writer today. They provide simple rules of thumb for minimizing radio's limitations and maximizing its assets.

## **The Narrative Hook**

Listeners can easily turn off a program, so you can't afford the theater writer's luxury of beginning your radio play with exposition. The conventional wisdom has it that you must catch the audience within the first 10 to 15 seconds. Any device you use for this purpose is called the narrative hook. Once you have excited the audience, you can assume they will listen with patience for a few minutes while you deliver the background information. It is my opinion that

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audio drama is so powerful that if you successfully hook the audience in that first brief window of time (and do not subsequently alienate listeners by confusing or irritating them), the audience will be unable to turn off your program.

Sometimes the narrative hook is built into the billboard, or stereotyped opening, of the series for which you are writing. The billboard may contain a teaser, an exciting excerpt from your play, or may create excitement without one. Indeed, so important is the billboard as narrative hook that traditional American radio is full of memorable openings:

Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear...

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?

Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane!

Even when the billboard assists, you're well advised to begin your play strongly. Narrative hooks do not necessarily have to be sensational, though they often are.

COP: (FILTER) Twenty-third Precinct. Sergeant Duffy spea . . .

FLODELLE: Help! Help!

My most successful opening scene begins quietly like this:

VOICE: Something on your mind?

PAUL: I - uh - yeah. . . . Nothing new.

VOICE: I wonder if talking about it might not relieve some of the tension.

PAUL: I don't know.

VOICE: Want to try?

PAUL: Yeah. . . . I - uh - I don't know where to start.

VOICE: One place to start is with the thing that's most troubling you.

(pause)

PAUL: Well . . .there was a girl. I guess there's always a girl. And there was a friend - I guess there's always a friend. . . . But they're not any more. (sinking into reverie) They were killed.

I don't get to mayhem until about forty seconds in. Immediately, however, the audience is made aware that it is eavesdropping on a troubled patient and his therapist. Something important is obviously hovering in the air. The success of the scene as a narrative hook depends upon how it's played: the soothing compassion of the Voice and Paul's intense, twitchy introversion.

## **Establishing the Scene**

Unless you purposely withhold the information for effect, establish who's in the scene, where they are, and what they're doing within the scene's opening half-dozen lines. All principal characters present when the scene opens should speak to establish themselves within these opening lines.

In the scene excerpted above, we don't hear lines, or even a sound bed, that tells us where we are or who's speaking, but the context of the first two lines make clear the therapeutic setting, which person is the patient, and which the doctor. In many cases, you have to give the audience more explicit clues.

SOUND: FADE UP PUB ATMOSPHERE.

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ALICE: Ted, I'm very glad you could make it. I appreciate it. Really. But can't you just relax?

TED: Alright, Alice, what's this all about?

ALICE: Nostalgia, I suppose. Just an urge to see an old friend.

TED: But why here of all places?

ALICE: This was our favorite watering hole, as I recall. It's where you proposed to me. Don't you remember?

TED: All too well!

Alternately, you can simply tell the audience:

NARRATOR: Early the next morning, Grover and George appear in court to plead their case.

You can set up a scene in the previous one:

FRANK: Louise, where are you going?

LOUISE: To the factory, where else?

MUSIC: BRIDGE.

SOUND: FADE UP CAR FACTORY.

FOREMAN: Hey, you can't come in here. Dis is a hard hat area. Cantcha read de signs?

LOUISE: Where's Mr. Farcus? I've got to talk to him right away! It's a matter of life and death!

## **Scene Transitions**

The simplest, fastest way to change scenes is to use a few seconds of transitional music. Musical bridges are so familiar from television, films, and theater that upon hearing them, most listeners immediately recognize their significance. In the script, you only need the simplest of indications.

MUSIC: BRIDGE.

This indication tells script readers that the previous scene has ended, all sounds have faded out, and a new scene is to follow or to sneak up as the music ends. A bridge not only changes scenes but punctuates them. When such punctuation is inappropriate, you may simply fade one scene out and bring up the new one, jump cut to the new scene, or cross fade:

CHRIS: I know just what he'll say when I tell him. (fading) He'll say, "Christopher, my boy, when I was your age...

HORACE: (fading up under CHRIS) Christopher, my boy, when I was your age, money never concerned me.

Audio drama is so fluid that you can perform a transition of time and place in the middle of a scene. For example, in my Craven Street program, Benjamin Franklin, residing in London, visits Ireland where his enemy Lord Hillsborough treats him with surprising hospitality. As Franklin is leaving his lordship's country estate:

HILLSBOROUGH: Remember, Dr. Franklin, my door is always open to you. And I hope, sir, you will let me see you often in London.

MUSIC: BRIDGE.

SOUND: FADE UP CARRIAGE INTERIOR.

NARRATOR: Well, you certainly didn't expect such extravagant hospitality from the Secretary for America.

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FRANKLIN: He was wondrous civil.

NARRATOR: What do you make of it?

FRANKLIN: I know not what to make of it. Unless he foresees a storm, and desires to lessen beforehand the number of enemies he has so imprudently created.

NARRATOR: Yet, things look better now. . . .

FRANKLIN: They do indeed.

NARRATOR: A beam of light from the chink in Lord Hillsborough's door. Is that where you're going now?

FRANKLIN: To wait on his lordship, yes.

NARRATOR: It's a frosty January day. You're back in London and your coach is just pulling up to Hillsborough's city lodgings.

COACHMAN: (back) 'Ere we are, sir!

SOUND: COACH COMES TO A HALT.

Commonly British and Canadian audio dramatists change locale by the equivalent of a film "dissolve" — fading one scene out, pausing, and then fading up the next. Doing so tends to undercut any rhythm you have established. You also run the risk of confusing the audience because, unless there are loud and very different atmospheres under one or both scenes, this method does not always make the change clear. Used more judiciously and sparingly than in England and Canada, the simple fade-out and fade-up can produce a stage wait, anticlimax, or other dramatic punctuation.

You may also wish to employ two screen techniques from time to time: the **CROSSFADE** and the **JUMP CUT**. Both tend to enhance the impression that the scenes thus connected are related either by time or cause and effect.

### **Populations**

The larger the cast, the more the audience works to differentiate the characters. Limit the number of principals to three in modules of ten minutes or less, and to six in plays of a half-hour or more. You may have as many walk-ons and cameos as you wish, as long as their presence doesn't muddy the overall clarity or overwhelm production resources.

### **Clarity and Grace**

Beyond mechanics, be guided by the principles of clarity and suggestiveness. Clarity is the fundamental problem, suggestiveness the fundamental asset of audio drama. You must treat them with grace, subtlety and common sense, or risk anomalies and clichés such as:

DAWN: I hear a blue car pulling up.

SOUND: SNOW FALLING.

TOM: Now if I can only just (get to the phone/reach the door/untie these bonds/open this lid)...

TOM: (after saying the above) Ah! There!

GWEN: Look, Fred, a two-ton truck is bearing down on us!

It is better to suggest than describe, to plant seeds of images in the listeners' minds than to place fully grown potted plants on top of their radios. Invite your audiences to participate and give them plenty of opportunity. Just don't go so far that you create unintentional ambiguity.

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

### Physical Action

You can simply describe action with narration or dialogue, and perhaps you should when other alternatives seem awkward or time-wasting. More often, movement should be implied as naturally and gracefully as possible. The more skill you employ *suggesting* the setting and action, the more your listeners will see them in their mind's eye. As a rule of thumb, whatever the listener can infer without confusion is best: show don't tell.

You can suggest action with dialogue . . .

JEDIDIAH: May I see that?

CHARLES: Of course. Here.

JEDIDIAH: Hm! It's lighter than it looks. . . .

. . . with sound . . .

SOUND: A BLOW. BODY FALLS. . . .

. . . or a combination of dialogue, narration, sound, and even music.

SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE. SEA BIRDS. SURF, BACK.

CHARLES: Careful, dear. These rocks are treacherous.

NORA: (back slightly) Goodbye, cruel world!

NICK: No! Stop!

MUSIC: CHROMATIC DOWNWARD GLISSANDO.

SOUND: SPLASH FAR BACK.

NICK: Nora!

MUSIC: STING.

Avoid redundancy. When sound alone does the trick, why duplicate it with dialogue?

SOUND: FADE UP WIND IN THE TREES; BIRDS TWITTERING.

LORNA: Ah, here we are outside again!

Production elements should amplify and complement one another, each saying what the other can't or shouldn't say alone.

SOUND: FADE UP WIND IN THE TREES; BIRDS TWITTERING.

LORNA: Ah, what a beautiful day!

### Narration

Conventional wisdom says that you should avoid narration in audio drama. It is only a crutch that keeps you from discovering imaginative and organic means for communicating ideas. I think this is good advice for beginners. But skillful narration is too protean a tool to dismiss categorically. It allows you to combine the descriptive qualities of literature with the emotive power of drama. You can use it to telescope the time necessary for establishing important elements that would retard the dramatic flow or bore the audience if established using strictly dramatic tools. It makes interior monologue possible, facilitates flashbacks, aids clarity and, in adaptations of literary sources, helps convey the original author's style.

As in novels and stories, the narrator is often an omniscient third party, representing the author or totally impersonal, who may see not only the overt events, but the thoughts of the characters, and who may even comment on the purport of the action.

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SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE, WINTER. SLEIGH BELLS. HORSES TROTting RAPIDLY.

SOFIA: (drunkenly) Let me! I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver! . . . (etc., ad lib under)

NARRATOR: She stood up in the sled, and her husband, Vladimir Nikitch, and her childhood friend Vladimir Michalovitch, held her arms to prevent her from falling.

NIKITCH: I told you not to give her any brandy.

NARRATOR: The Colonel knew from experience that in women like his wife, too much wine brought raucous gaiety, then hysterical laughter and then tears.\*

Sometimes, as in first-person narration, one of the characters participating in the action also narrates. This works well for internal monologue, when the effect of the action on the narrator or when the narrator's thought processes or point of view is the central defining element of the drama. You must be careful to make clear when the character is narrating and when not.

SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE, WINTER. SLEIGH BELLS. HORSES TROTting RAPIDLY.

NIKITCH: (narrating) She was standing up in the sled and Vladimir Michalovitch and I were holding her arms to keep her from falling out. . . .

SOFIA: (drunkenly) Let me! I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver! . . . (etc., ad lib under)

MICHALOVITCH: (simultaneously) Be careful! Don't fall!

NIKITCH: (in scene) I told you not to give her any brandy. (narrating, disgustedly) I knew from experience that in women like my wife, too much wine brought raucous gaiety, then hysterical laughter, and then tears.

Old-style American radio borrowed the second-person narrator from pulp fiction to give the listener the sense that s/he is the main character:

SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE, WINTER. SLEIGH BELLS. HORSES TROTting RAPIDLY.

SOFIA: (drunkenly) Let me! I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver! . . . (etc., ad lib under)

NARRATOR: (over Sofia) She was standing up in the sled, you and her old friend Vladimir Michalovitch were holding her arms to keep her from falling.

NIKITCH: I told you not to give her any brandy.

NARRATOR: You knew from experience that in women like your wife, too much wine brought raucous gaiety, then hysterical laughter and then tears.

SOFIA: (overcome with emotion) Olga! Olga!

One may even borrow the technique of Story Theater, the marvelously compact narrative innovation developed by Paul Sills. In Story Theater, characters narrate their own action in asides to the audience. Their attitudes and reactions are apparent in the actor's delivery. The heart of the action, they act out. Audience attention remains with them, instead of being diverted to a separate narrator.

SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE, WINTER. SLEIGH BELLS. HORSES TROTting RAPIDLY.

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\* Anton Chekhov, "The Two Volodyas."

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

SOFIA: (drunkenly) Let me! I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver! . . . (narrating) Sofia Lvovna was standing up in the sled . . .

NIKITCH: (narrating, annoyed) Her husband, Vladimir Nikitch . . .

MICHALOVITCH (narrating, amused) . . . and her childhood friend Vladimir Michalovitch were holding her arms to prevent her from falling.

NIKITCH: (in scene) I told you not to give her any brandy. (narrating) The Colonel knew from experience that in women like his wife, too much wine brought raucous gaiety, then hysterical laughter, and then tears.

In any case, your narrator is a character. You must hear his/her voice in your head in a way that the writer of printed fiction does not. The narrator needs speakable lines as much as your other characters. Too many clauses spoil the broth. Compare . . .

For the last two months, ever since her wedding, she had been tortured by the thought that she had married Colonel Yagitch from worldly motives and, as it is said, *par dèèpit*; but that evening, at the restaurant, she had suddenly become convinced that she loved him passionately.\*

. . . to . . .

For the last two months — ever since her wedding, in fact — she'd been tortured by the thought that she'd married the Colonel from worldly motives. *Par dèèpit*, as they say. "Out of spite." But that evening, at the restaurant, she suddenly became convinced that she loved him. Passionately.

One of the strengths of drama in any medium is the sense of immediacy, of events unfolding while the audience watches or listens. Narrating can strip your play of this asset. Anything you want the audience to experience, not merely take cognizance of, should be exposed through dialogue, sound, or music, not narration. Unless you wish to stress the present state of mind of the narrator as informed by past events, narrate in the present tense:

Sofia Lvovna stands up in the sled. Her husband, Vladimir Nikitch, and her childhood friend, Vladimir Michalovitch, hold her arms to prevent her from falling.

At times, narration can significantly contribute to the sense of immediacy. In Archibald MacLeish's radio play *Fall of the City* (1937), the narrator is an on-the-spot newscaster, describing events as they unfold. He reports that a conqueror in full armor is advancing on the city. The citizens panic. Out of fear, they capitulate before a shot can be fired. The conqueror enters the city without having to strike a blow. The newscaster sees the whole thing:

They cover their faces with fingers. They cower before him.  
They fall: they sprawl on the stone. He's alone where he's walking.  
He marches with rattle of metal. He tramples his shadow.  
He mounts by the pyramid — stamps on the stairway — turns —  
His arm rises — his visor is opening. . . . There's no one! . . .  
The metal is empty! The armor is empty! I tell you  
There's no one at all there: there's only the metal: The barrel of metal:  
The bundle of armor. It's empty!\*\*

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\* Chekhov, *op. cit.*

\*\* MacLeish, Archibald. *The Fall of the City*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc. 1937.

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Orson Welles, who played the newscaster in the original broadcast, borrowed the idea a year later for his notorious *War of the Worlds*, which had more immediacy than anybody desired.

In audio as in conventional drama, the characters and events should reveal themselves. Motivation and purport should be implicit in the action. To have a narrator make these things explicit is to beat your listeners over the head with your message, distance them from the drama, and insult them at the same time. Narration should therefore intrude very gingerly, if at all.

SOUND: OUTDOOR ATMOSPHERE, WINTER. SLEIGH BELLS. HORSES TROTting RAPIDLY.

SOFIA: (drunkenly) Let me! I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver! . . .

NIKITCH: (topping her) Sofia, do sit down! Do you want to kill yourself?

MICHALOVITCH: Don't worry, I've got her arm!

SOFIA: Wait a minute, driver. I'll get up on the box beside you. (etc., ad lib)

NIKITCH: (over Sofia) I told you not to give her any brandy. When women like my wife drink, first comes raucous gaiety, then hysterical laughter, and then tears.

### Speeches

Interrupt long speeches every six lines or so to prevent the audience from losing the presence of the other characters in the scene.

Avoid orations. Generally, long harangues and dialogue without action fall flat in audio. They tend to drone on the ear. Besides, American actors, especially the younger ones, typically do not learn the phrasing that makes soliloquies interesting.



# **SIX**

## **Manuscript Formats**

### **General**

#### **Formatting applicable to all MS styles**

Type scripts to facilitate production. Punctuate to aid sight-reading. For instance, actors find periods, dashes (—) and ellipses (. . .) more useful than colons and semi-colons. Uses dashes for sudden transitions and ellipses for brief pauses. Em (long) dashes should be used for transitions and en (short) dashes for hyphens.

When using a PC use only Windows system fonts. Doing so guards against troubles that otherwise could arise when using electronic mail.

Justify left margins, leave right margins ragged.

Do not change typeface or size except as noted below.

Use good quality, opaque bond paper for spec scripts, and, if available, a soft, “silent,” opaque paper for production.

Type only on one side of the paper, never on both.

Place page numbers in the upper right corner of the page.

Place line numbers 1" from the left edge of the paper.

Align cues 1½½" from the left edge of the paper.

Place dialogue and descriptions 3½½" from the left edge of the paper.

Enclose dialogue directions in parentheses, and include within dialogue.

Notes to actors — e.g., (quietly), (fading up) — should be lower case. Technical notes — e.g., (FILTER), (ECHO) should be upper case. When tech and interpretive indications appear together, enclose them in one set of parentheses and separate them by a semi-colon: (FILTER; expectantly).

Keep interpretive indications to a bare minimum.

Type indications to actors that affect more than one character upper case, enclose in parentheses and set them off on their own lines.

Leave two letter spaces between sentences.

Do not split a word at the end of a line.

Never bind with a permanent device, such as staples or plastic spine. Actors have difficulty turning bound pages silently at the mike.

Be aware that few producers will bother to read:

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

- a hand written script,
- a script typed on a manual typewriter,
- a bad photocopy,
- a carbon, mimeograph, or ditto copy,
- or anything other than a neat, clean original or crisp photocopy.

The final page of a script should be blank. The blank page protects the final page of body copy.

### Sound, Music, and Interpretive Indications

Keep these terse and functional. If a character has to open a door, so indicate. But, even if you hear in your mind characters shifting in a chair or scratching as they talks, leave those actions out. Sound cues in scripts are strictly utilitarian. If a sound is not needed to advance the plot, set the scene or clarify action, leave it out of the script.

The producer decides when to introduce mood music under a scene; you need only show bridges and source music. Generally, the producer determines the decorative and complementary uses of sound and music; the writer indicates only the functional occurrences. When your play requires a special handling of effects or music, discuss your preferences in an introductory paragraph or two of notes on a separate page.

Be stingy with parenthetical directions to the actors, and confine them to the briefest words and phrases. Directorial remarks interrupt speeches and interfere with smooth delivery. You can help actors with their line readings more with typographical cues: punctuation, underscoring, capitalization, etc.

Except for familiar contractions, avoid typing dialect phonetically unless a particular effect depends on pronunciation.

Telescope sound, music, and interpretive indications by using a few common terms. The Audio Dramatists' Lexicon explains:

back	beat	bridge	cross	crossfade	cut to	echo
ext.	fade	fade out	fade up	filter	hot on mike	int.
jump to	off mike	on mike	out	reverb	sting	top

After a musical bridge, you don't need a separate indication to take out all the atmospheres of the previous scene. It is assumed that the bridge wipes them all out.

Transitional indications (crosses and fades) should appear after the cue every time movement occurs. The stopping point should be shown if there's any chance of confusion.

LUCRECIA: (crossing slowly to him) You wouldn't do that to me.

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BRENDA: Don't come any closer!

LUCRECIA: (still crossing) Have a heart. . . .

BRENDA: You heard me!

LUCRECIA: (stopping) Okay. You win.

Indications for static conditions (back, echo, filter, hot on mike, off mike, quietly, reverb, etc.) are assumed to continue until otherwise noted. You need only make the indication at the first pertinent line.

GLENN: Hello?

GRISWOLD: (FILTER) Is that you, Glenn?

GLENN: Who is this?

GRISWOLD: It's me, your nemesis . . .

Volume changes not resulting from changes in mike position, as when scenes end or begin are indicated by one of the fade cues. Volume changes caused by physical actions are best indicated by phrases such as "entering," "leaving," "moving closer," "backing away," etc.

SVETLANA: This is too loud.

MUSIC: FADE SLIGHTLY.

IGOR: Leave my TV alone!

SVETLANA: (bustling out) It'll wake the kids.

Sound positions are assumed to be on-mike unless otherwise noted. Indicate the on-mike position only to show that an off-mike or transitional position has changed. Even then, most of the time, the transition will be clear without your specifically indicating that someone has come on-mike.

MERYL: Where are you?

JERQUOIS: (off-mike) In the kitchen.

MERYL: Can you come here a minute?

JERQUOIS: (entering) What's the matter?

MERYL: Take a look at this.

JERQUOIS: The Schleppenese ceramic vase? Seems perfectly normal to me.

When you've indicated that characters have moved, you need not also introduce a separate sound indication, and vice-versa. In general, indicate character movement in the line unless the sound of the movement is important. You may do this:

TITANIA: (entering) It's raining cats and dogs!

ALONZO: Don't drip on the carpet!

. . . or . . .

SOUND: TITANIA'S SQUISHY FOOTFALLS.

TITANIA: It's raining cats and dogs!

ALONZO: Don't drip on the carpet!

. . . but the following is unnecessary.

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

SOUND: TITANIA'S SQUISHY FOOTFALLS.

TITANIA: (entering) It's raining cats and dogs!

ALONZO: Don't drip on the carpet!

### Dialogue

In dialogue, avoid using colons and semi-colons. Instead a dash (-- or —) indicates an abrupt transition.

Why, thank y — Say! What did you mean by that?

A dash at the end of a speech means that the speaker trails off without finishing a thought.

You mean —?

Ellipses indicate a brief pause or interruption. Type ellipses as three dots and a space, or as the final punctuation at ends of sentences, four dots (or ! three dots, or ? three dots) and a space.

Well... what now?

Hello?... This is she.... No thanks.

Ellipses at the beginning of a line indicates that the speaker is continuing a previous speech.

... and that's when I punched him.

Ellipses at the end of a speech indicate that the speaker has been interrupted.

FRANK: What I meant was...

JOAN: I don't care what you meant!

When a character talks over or ignores an interruption, ellipses appear on both sides of the interruption.

BILL: And that's why I say...

ARNOLD: Don't listen to him!

BILL: ... Arnold should be drawn and quartered.

Emphasized words or phrases should be indicated by underlining or upper case. Avoid italics, except as indicated below in the Production Manuscript section.

Treat numbers in dialogue as text. Spell them out the way you want actors to pronounce them.

June 2 = June Second or the Second of June

\$100 = a hundred dollars

.5 million = five-hundred thousand or half a million

-30° = minus thirty degrees or thirty below zero

253.25 = two-hundred and fifty-three and twenty-five one-hundredths or two-hundred fifty-three point twenty-five

Handle poetry appropriately to save page room and make for easy sight reading:

You ought to make | Your page look terse | And type like this | Short bits of verse.

. . . or . . .

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

Whate'er the style of manuscript you use,  
You ought to type like this on sep'rate lines  
Your longish passages of poesy.

### Front Matter

Type front matter for spec scripts (see below) using a non-proportional (12 point) serified font (Courier on most PCs). For other MS styles, readable 12 point proportional type faces are acceptable.

### Cover and Fly (Title) Pages

Center title upper case about a third of the way down the page.

Skip four spaces then double space the author information.

Skip about 30 spaces (or on PC's treat as a footer) and type the author's, agent's or production organization's name and address at a 1½" margin. A copyright notice isn't necessary, but if you feel safer with it, place it here. If you have not registered the script with the Library of Congress, do not use a date.

copyright Inspyrd Beithuh Myoosuz

© The Saiwutt Radio Theater

copyright © KPTZ

The same distance down near the right-hand margin, production companies may have reason to add the date and the draft number. Individuals need not do so when preparing an audio play for submission to a producer.

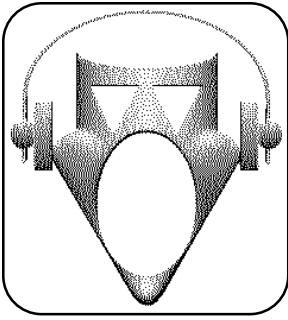
When you prepare a script for production, you may wish to get a little fancy with the title page. For instance, when preparing a series or serial, you can print the series title with fancy lettering and/or a logo. Doing this with taste helps show off your professionalism to everyone who sees the script. Every little bit helps.

I recommend full copyright information on the title page of a production script. A lot of people will see copies and have opportunities to plagiarize.

When you register the produced program, the script will automatically be registered. You only need to copyright the script if the production is to be copyrighted by someone else. Even then, it is not always necessary.

In the example shown of a production script title page, a standard copyright warning is used, as well as the notice. In addition, the series' episode number appears in large letters for easy identification.

Example: Cover page →



the HOLLYWOOD  
THEATER of the EAR

# THE SPECKLED BAND

an adventure of Sherlock Holmes

by  
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

**DRAFT**  
**2**

March 16, 2004

The Hollywood Theater of the Ear  
2832 Avenel St #1  
Hollywood CA 90039

THE SPECKLED BAND

An Adventure of Sherlock Holmes

by

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

DRAFT 2

# **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

## **Cast of Characters Page**

Should appear immediately after the title page.

Margins: Left 1½", all others 1".

No page numbers or header.

List may be single (long list) or double (short list) spaced.

Names in caps.

List in order of appearance.

Character descriptions are not required, but sometimes desirable to assist actors and director. Type lower case after the character's name. Separate from the name with a comma.

After all the speaking roles, list the walla (crowd noises).

JIM, 30, a nude model or A nude model

MARCIA, 20, a detective or A detective

FLORESTAN, 50, a Ruritanian spy or A Ruritanian...

Townsfolk, Martian invaders, members of Congress

Some producers also like to see a list of sound and music requirements on this page, but I don't find that practical. As a producer, I add those and other notes on separate pages sandwiched between this page and the body of the script.



THE SPECKLED BAND  
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

SHERLOCK HOLMES, The great detective  
DR WATSON, His Friend  
BILLY, page to Sherlock Holmes  
DR GRIMSESBY RYLOTT, A retired Anglo-Indian surgeon. Owner of  
Stoke Moran Manor  
ENID STONOR, His stepdaughter  
ALI, An Indian, valet to Dr Rylott  
RODGERS, butler to Dr Rylott  
MRS STAUNTON, housekeeper to Dr Rylott  
MR SCOTT WILSON, engaged to Enid's sister  
MR LONGBRACE, coroner  
MR BREWER, foreman of the Jury  
MR ARMITAGE, a juror, the village grocer  
MR HOLT LOAMING, client of Sherlock Holmes  
MR MILVERTON, client of Sherlock Holmes  
MR JAMES B. MONTAGUE, client of Sherlock Holmes  
MRS SOAMES, client of Sherlock Holmes  
CORONER'S OFFICER

ACT I  
The Hall of Stoke Place, Stoke Moran

*(Two years are supposed to elapse)*

ACT II  
Scene 1. A sitting-room in Stoke Place  
Scene 2. Mr Sherlock Holmes's Room in Baker Street

ACT III  
Scene 1. The Hall of the Stoke Moran Manor House  
Scene 2. Enid's Bedroom, Stoke Place

## **The Spec Script**

“Spec” is short for “speculation.” Writers use this MS style when making submissions to producers and competitions for consideration.



1 LUCILLE (CONT'D) with a new cue and (CONT'D).

2 NORMAN (fading up) The first line number of

3 every page is always 1. Exactly 24 lines

4 per page. No paragraphing within cues.

5 (coughs) Do not separate the action into

6 acts and scenes.

7 ORSON If a sound or music cue, or general

8 direction, interrupts a line of

9 dialogue...

10 SOUND PHONE RINGS.

11 ORSON ...treat it as two lines, the first ended

12 and the second started with ellipses.

13 VIC (FILTER) If you absolutely must make

14 corrections by hand, do so neatly in

15 black ink. You're best advised to retype

16 pages that require corrections.

17 MUSIC STING.

18 SADE Of course, the computer makes tidy edits

19 much easier than ever and should obviate

20 the necessity for hand-written

21 corrections.

22 SOUND CROSSFADE TO BOTTLING PLANT AMBIANCE.

23 WORKERS SINGING "HI HO! HI HO!" UNDER:

24 PERKINS More cola! We're out of cola!

## **The Production Script**

There is no prescribed style for use in the studio. If you choose, you can use spec MS. However, the following style is much more practical. The idea is to fit as much on one page as possible while remaining readable and while still leaving room for actors' marginal notes. The style reduces the number of times actors must turn pages as they read. Every turn of the page is potentially an unwanted noise. For this reason, I sometimes use legal-size paper. However, the actors find the larger paper awkward.

Copy on soft (*i.e.*, quiet) three-hole punch paper, if possible. Bind talent's copies with brass fasteners. I use only one fastener at the top left. By no means allow talent to staple their pages. They will have more difficulty turning stapled pages silently than loose pages. They can remove brads before coming to the mike. Copies for the producer, director, P.A., and engineer(s) should go into three-ring binders. Include the charts for stereo blocking (see below) and other notes in the producer's, foley walker's, and engineer's copies.

1. SOUND FADE UP OUTDOOR DAY AMBIANCE. HOLD UNDER:
2. BEN Use a readable, compact proportionally-spaced serif typeface, such as Times Roman, and set at 12 point.
3. SOUND ABOUT ½-INCH DOWN FLUSHED LEFT GOES AN OPTIONAL SLUG LINE. PAGE NUMBER IS FLUSH RIGHT OPPOSITE.
4. BARNEY Top text margin is ½-inch down from the slug line. Bottom margin is no less than ¾-inch from page bottom. It will vary from page to page. Do not divide into scenes and acts. Number each cue (paragraph), rather than each line. Each page starts with cue number 1. Single space within a line, 2 space between cues. To aid the reader, separate long speeches into paragraphs of from seven to ten lines each.
5. If a speech is between 11 and 19 lines, divide it into two paragraphs at or near the halfway point. All parenthetical technical indications, those intended for the foley walker, engineer or musicians, are underlined and in caps.
6. IDA (FILTER) All parenthetical directions to actors are lower case and NOT underlined. (weeping) Sometimes, directorial and technical indications occur at the same time. As in Sammy's next line.
7. SAMMY (REVERB, laughing) If a sound or music cue, or general direction interrupts a line of dialogue on one page...
8. NO CUE IN THE LEFT MARGIN.
9. ...type as you see it here.
10. BEN Split dialogue between pages only if at least two lines fit on the first page. Otherwise, start the cue on the second page. Split only after a complete sentence. Begin the second page with a new cue and (CONT'D).
11. YUNK Don't split words at the end of a line or sentences at the end of a page.
12. MUSIC SOUND AND MUSIC NOTES ARE UNDERLINED AND UPPER CASE.

## **The Multi-scene Script**

When you have a long script with many scenes and characters, you may find this multi-scene format helpful. It can facilitate taping and post-production. Actors like it, too. Use the production MS formatting with the additions and exceptions shown in the sample.

Everyone can easily see which actors are needed for each scene. When making a taping schedule, you can easily group scenes by cast, ganging all pages requiring similar groups of actors in the same production period. You can easily pull pages to make sides. When you finish taping one scene, your P.A. can see at a glance who's needed for the next one and herd them in from the waiting area.

24. VLAD Divide into acts and scenes. Scene headings should include both act and scene numbers. They should be underlined or, better, bolded and set in large type.
25. LUCY They appear centered and single spaced. Follow with a brief description of the locale and list all the characters.

**ACT ONE****SCENE 10****Ext. Alligator Park Camp Grounds, later that night***David, Judith, Warren*

1. MINA It is not necessary to begin the scene with a sound cue, such as FADE UP PARK AMBIANCE.
2. SEWARD The four-line scene heading and the first line of the scene should always appear on the same page. Most word processors allow you to keep a block of text together.
3. LUCY Start each act on a fresh page.
4. HARKER Start scenes two spaces down from the preceding scenes, except at the beginning of Acts.
5. VAN HELSING Nothing below but that damned thick foliage. How the hell will we ever find him in that?
6. RENFIELD Starting scenes on fresh pages may facilitate taping, as actors only need bring the current scene to the mike. This, however, is not my practice. I'll do it when the price of paper comes down.
7. MUSIC PAGE NUMBERS ON THE UPPER RIGHT MAY, BUT NEED NOT, INCLUDE THE ACT NUMBER IN ROMAN NUMERALS, THE SCENE NUMBER IN LOWER CASE ROMAN, AND THE PAGE NUMBER IN ARABIC.
8. GODOLMING Each number is separated with a hyphen or colon. Use the scene number that concludes the page (*e.g.*, "I - ii - 18"). Begin each act on a separate page. If taping out of sequence, you may consider beginning each scene on a separate page, but doing so complicates post.
9. CARFAX Cue numbers start with 1 at the beginning of each scene and run consecutively until the end of the scene. Each scene starts with cue 1.



## **Other Alternatives**

IMHO, the formats discussed above are the most professional and practical. The producer can refine them for personal taste. Be that as it may, many producers have their own house preferences. One veteran writer uses a style more appropriate for publishing than production. Another uses a variation of A/V style, in which sfx and music appear in a left-hand column and dialogue on the right. Below are other more common formats.

Commercially available computer software made especially for scripting (e.g., Final Draft, Scriptware, etc.) ignores audio drama. Writers who like using this software adapt television and film formats to audio, as shown at left. One page roughly equals a minute of playing time. The main benefit is typing speed, because formatting and certain repetitive tasks are accomplished more or less automatically. You can probably automate similar key strokes on a PC using macros. For the producer, no particular benefit derives from using TV/film formats as far as I can tell.

### **BBC Style for Freelance Writers**

The British Broadcasting Corporation, world's largest buyer of radio scripts, currently has free radio script template software on-line that works with Microsoft Word. On the Beeb's Writers Room web page, you can download sample scripts formatted in the house style. Remember, though, that British page dimensions differ from the standard American 8½" x 11".

#### **Free BBC "Scriptsmart" Template Software for Microsoft Word**

[bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scriptsmart/](http://bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scriptsmart/)

#### **BBC Radio Drama Writers' Guidelines**

[bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writing/radiodrama.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writing/radiodrama.shtml)

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

# SEVEN

## Behind the Microphone

### **JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Title:** Actor

**Supervisor:** The Director

**Duties:** In consort with the other members of the production, to help bring to life the imaginary world of the play in which you are performing, by:

convincingly impersonating the character(s) assigned to you in an appropriate style consistent with that of your cast mates;  
aspiring to perform your task with a certain finesse and grace of expression; although some occasional ugliness and stridency may be employed for effect, you aim for sonority and resonance;  
promoting a productive and stimulating work environment by following the precepts of professionalism set forth in Appendix 2 of this book, and  
maintaining your "instrument" (see below) at peak performance.

## **Some Acting Basics**

### **Script Preparation**

#### **Methodology**

The first thing you have to do is study the script to ferret out the values you have to play. Sometimes circumstances force you to begin rehearsals cold. You may not even receive a copy of the play until the first rehearsal. Otherwise, it is always a good idea to do the prep. For me, this consists of steps that bring to bear intuitive insights and a conscious parsing of elements:

Read the whole play silently to yourself. This gives you a sense of the dramatic flow of the piece as a whole, its style, tone and atmosphere, and a general view of your character and his/her relationship to the whole. Even a walk-on deserves a reading.

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

Mark the script by highlighting your lines with a yellow marking pen. Highlighting presents numerous advantages at the mike, as well as giving you another gander at your character.

Read your lines aloud at least once the day before rehearsal or taping. Some values occur to you automatically when you read aloud. You can also discover difficult passages, and go over them until they no longer present problems. If things are still puzzling you, make a list of questions to raise with the director. When I have long speeches full of complexities, I may mark the script in red to show breathing places, emphases, etc. I do this work the evening before or the morning of a session, so that the work is fresh in my mind when I show up at the studio. Many actors do this work alone, but I like going over scenes with a friend reading with me. That way I can get a feeling for the interplay between my character and others.

Keep an open mind. No matter how thoroughly you prepare, you do not gain everything you need until you begin rehearsing with your director and cast mates. Therefore, you ought not to adhere rigidly to the ideas you acquired during your prep.

### **Values**

What exactly are you looking for during all the prep? The answer to one question: Who am I playing? Or, better just Who am I? — for, posing the question in that way helps you identify with your character. The more you can be your character, rather than play your character, the more genuine your performance will sound. This is what is meant by “character development.” To flush out your identity, you study the script to find answers to a constellation of sub-questions:

- What kind of world do I live in? heroic? naturalistic? realistic? romantic? modern? archaic? mythic? fairy tale? symbolic or emblematic (if so, in what way)? chaotic? orderly? etc.
- What are the values of this world? its moral, political, economic and social imperatives? its culture? its world view?
- How do I fit into this world? What is my relationship to the other characters? Am I famous? obscure? a prime mover or ganzer makher? a blight on the landscape? an anonymous prol? a benefactor to mankind? etc.
- What is my “back story?” Where have I been and what have I done before my first entrance in the play? How do these experiences bear upon my personality and behavior through the course of the play?
- What are my quirks? the superficial manifestations of my personality? Have I an accent? a disability? a speech impediment, a phobia, a nervous tick of some kind? a propensity to whisper or shout? Am I voluble, taciturn? mercurial, reticent? discreet? rash? anal? oral? neurotic? well adjusted? How do I interact with others? etc. etc.
- What’s my motivation? Why do I do things I do and say the things I say? What drives me? What are my moral, social, familial, political and economic values?
- What do I want — from life, from these other characters, in this situation?
- What happens to me in the play? Do I grow or change? How, when and why?

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

- What is my function in the play? Am I comic relief? protagonist, antagonist? do I propel the plot forward? if so, when and how?

Two elements especially to watch out for:

### Subtext

Your lines always have an overt meaning; they almost always have an implicit meaning as well, which we call the “sub-text.”

I once acted in the world’s second worst production of Chekhov’s *The Sea Gull* (pride will not allow me to admit that it was the very worst). In Act Two, the young alcoholic Masha, sitting outside with other characters, wants to sneak inside for a drink. She’s had a bit too much already, even though it’s only late morning. To give herself an excuse to withdraw, she says, “It must be lunch time.” She then starts out, but staggers slightly, for she has already been drinking. Again to cover, she tells the others. “My leg’s asleep.” Our Masha did not understand the motivation for these lines. So she’d risen and said, “It must be lunchtime, my leg’s asleep” as if it were cause and effect — as if she knows it’s time to eat because her limb always falls asleep at noon.

Masha’s intention to deceive the other characters about her drinking forms the subtext of the lines. Characters do not always say what they mean, much less mean what they say. They often speak in code – as in real life. When someone asks you “How do I look?” does that person really want the truth? You must play the implicit meaning of your lines when there is one. You must also understand why the meaning is covert and not overt. We know the lady means “let’s go inside and canoodle” when she asks the guy in for a nightcap. But why doesn’t she just come out and say it? What is it in her character, or in the social conventions of her milieu, or the circumstances leading up to this moment? An actor playing the lady must find answers to these questions before in order to deliver the line correctly.

Thus, you, too, must understand the explicit and implicit, overt and covert meanings of your lines, and play both simultaneously. A performance lacking subtext renders Chekhov excruciatingly dull, Pinter incomprehensible, and just about everything else superficial.

Let’s return to *The Sea Gull* a moment. Chekhov assumes you’re smart enough to figure out the subtext yourself. Why should he insult your intelligence? Of course, he may be over-estimating your intelligence. In the text, he writes only:

MASHA (gets up) It must be lunch time. (walks with a lazy, lagging step) My leg’s asleep.  
(goes off)

DORN. She’ll go and have a couple of nips before lunch.

How do we know what her subtext is and her motivation for it? We know from everything we’ve learned about her by having read the entire play before coming back to study this scene. We know from her demeanor in the scene leading up to her line. And we know because of Dorn’s line, by which we also learn that he, at least, is not fooled. You ferret out such touches when you study the text, something every actor should do thoroughly before rehearsals start.

Nonetheless, thorough “cabinet” study only goes so far. You only fully discover your character and how to play him/her in rehearsal with the help of the production team and in

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

concert with the other actors. For that matter, rehearsing the same character in a second production of the same script teaches you something new and possibly very different from what you learned before. Therefore, the product of your solitary study of the script should not close your mind to further discovery “on your feet,” as they say, as you rehearse and perform with the cast. Your attitude should be open.

If that’s true, why bother studying the script in the first place? In audio drama, for two reasons: Study keeps you from tripping over your lines as you work with the cast. And second, it’s better to contribute something, even if it’s wrong, than to give nothing. Just as it is easier pull back when you find yourself over-acting than to pump up when you’re not giving enough, so it is that whatever you bring to the mike helps reveal the right thing to do. And, as King Lear said, “nothing will come of nothing.”

### **Intention**

Every character in every scene has one or more intentions or goals to accomplish in that scene. These intentions are always present, and, unless they inform your performance, the scene won’t go anywhere. So, in your script study you must decide what they are. I say decide rather than discover or learn, because playwrights do not always provide them. This is often evident in unmotivated entrances and exits; characters showing up or scooting out when convenient for the playwright. In such cases, you must invent a reason for your entering or leaving. In drama, every character must have reasons for his or her utterances and actions.

### **Your Instrument and Its Care**

In the discussion that follows, I will often mention your “instrument.” An actor is his own instrument. You play yourself like a musician plays a violin. You use your instrument (your body, mind and soul) to play the score — that is, the script — with as much skill, artistry, and heart as your talent, conditioning, and experience can muster. In this discussion, when I mention your instrument, I’ll be talking specifically about that part of you illustrated above, the part that produces speech.

Now, while a violinist can acquire a magnificently hand-crafted Stradivarius to saw away on, you get only whatever pops out of that old dispensing machine called Mom. You can buff it up a bit with the proper care, get the best out of it with frequent practice, take it in now and then for maintenance or a few alterations, but it’s the only instrument you’ll ever have.

You better come to understand its strengths and limitations. Molière, for instance, already successful as a comic actor, wanted to gain celebrity as a tragedian, too. But when he tried it, he found he had neither the stature nor the power for tragedy. He was short, and a lung ailment had weakened his already piping voice. So, he remained a comedian literally until the day he died after a performance of his own play, *The Imaginary Invalid*.

Considering that you can never replace your instrument, you have to take better care of it than the violinist does his priceless Strad. This is a matter of rest, diet, exercise, and, especially, playing your instrument properly — the matter of vocal production. Vocal production lies outside this book’s purview. Nonetheless, I urge you, if you haven’t done so already, to bone up on it. Aspiring actors with speech impediments such as lisps, stutters, and adenoids obviously need work with a good therapist or coach. Have no impediments? Then, while you may, as many

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actors do, get away with performing without any knowledge of the proper way to use the instrument, your health depends on it. Actors can tear their vocal chords, grow nodes in their throats, give themselves laryngitis, and do all sorts of other damage, some of it irreparable. Problems of the sort are all too common in our business.

### **Diet and Rest**

Without proper rest, your voice can go gravelly on you or give out entirely. The tired actor is likely to get dry mouth, which creates irritating mouth noises. Neither do you want to endure a studio session when you're cranky, blurry-eyed, woozy, foggy brained, or aching from fatigue. Part of keeping yourself alert is eating properly. A bad diet not only weakens your stamina, but also can contribute time-wasting in the john and audible (and singularly obnoxious) noises.

When to eat is as important as what to eat. I advise a light, high protein meal no less than an hour before a session. If you break for food during a long session, eat something light and energy-producing. Avoid foods that mess with your voice, like crumbly stuff or gooey, throat-sticking stuff. (Although, a small amount of honey is good for a scratchy throat.) Avoid milk products, as they make you phlegmy. And do not wreck your instrument, as I have done, with tobacco.

Or your mind and body with dissipation. I've known actors who take a wee nip before a session to loosen up. Unwise. The mixture of any mind-altering substance with adrenaline impairs judgment and often has unpredictable results. Find a way to loosen up without chemicals.

**Breathing and Breath Control.** Proper breathing is essential for actors. You produce vocal sounds by passing air from your lungs through your larynx (voice box) and letting the vocal folds vibrate from the air pressure. If you can't control your air flow, your speech will become jerky or otherwise distorted due to tension — or worse, it could actually stop. An improper breathing pattern produces short shallow breaths and tenses your shoulders, neck, and larynx. Such tension will damage your instrument. So it is important to learn to breathe properly.

Respiration is a function of your skeletal frame (rib cage, spinal column, pelvis) and your most important breathing muscle — the diaphragm. Breathing “from the diaphragm” is called intercostal-abdominal respiration. It is the most appropriate style for actors. It prevents strain of the vocal folds and provides the necessary breath control for proper phrasing. I can't go into more detail here, but recommend that you seek out a vocal coach who will teach it.

Bad posture automatically reduces the volume of the chest cavity and promotes shallow breathing from the upper chest. When we breathe using the upper chest, we fill only the upper lobes of our lungs that constitute only a small fraction of our lung capacity. In contrast, when we are relaxed (but not slouched), the free and easy expansion and contraction of the lungs, diaphragm (i.e., that muscle layer that separates the lungs from the digestive system), ribcage and spine is enhanced during breathing, thereby increasing the volume of air that we inhale/exhale. Consequently, we have more breath to sustain the length and quality of our speech.

### **Nerves**

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

Breathing for speech is very much dependent on how relaxed you feel. You must be reasonably relaxed. Tension can do serious damage to your instrument, as well as mar your breathing. Besides, you can't act if you're tense. You can't even think. On the other hand, doing or ingesting anything that makes you sleepy or doopey ain't a good idea either. You still need to be alert, if not excited, when you play. Fortunately for you, breathing exercises tend to relax you without fatiguing. So does focusing on the job at hand and letting yourself enjoy the sheer fun of performing.

Yes, some actors get "mike fright," the way some others get stage fright. Performing an audio play before a studio audience makes you susceptible to both. Rarely, however, does the same actor suffer from both. I don't know why. I only know that such anxieties are curable by breathing/relaxation exercises, experience, and a supportive work environment.

### **You and Your Director**

The director is despot of a production. Even your mutual boss, the producer, defers to your director during sessions. You, the actor, do what the director says whether you agree with the instruction or not. That's part of the trust I wrote about above — and part of the risk. Not that you two can't discuss problematic areas. You can always ask questions and request help. You ought never backseat drive and should exercise discretion about offering suggestions. Some directors welcome input and discussion with actors, some don't. You have to determine which kind of director you have before introducing any disagreement; you must also choose opportune times. If you want to try something, a bit of business or a new line reading, rather than ask the director, just do it. The director will either say nothing, in which case, you can assume what you did is okay, or will tell you if your innovation works.

Audio presents the opportunity for silent direction during performance via the directorial hand signals shown elsewhere in this volume. When they are employed, as during performance before a studio audience, you are like a musician in an orchestra who has to keep one eye on the sheet music and another on the conductor. In a pinch, concentrating on the script is more important than watching the signals. Like the musician, you can only notice the director's hands out of the corner of your eye (at times), and look up when the signal seems to be directed at you. Like orchestra conducting, directorial hand waving, during performances at any rate, is mostly for show.

### **Voice Acting**

Acting involves an odd stew of elements — skill, experience, personality, appearance (or, in our case, sound), energy, presence, emotion, innate ability. All recipes for the stew include some or all of these ingredients in varying proportions. Not all recipes work all of the time, but in the right kitchen with the right cook, the most preposterous may turn out quite savory. That is why supermodels, sports figures, and rap artists can forge successful second careers as actors, and why actors can break all the rules and get away with it. A talented chef can cook to the satisfaction of patrons solely on instinct, but that is not to say that cooking school is a waste of time. Why waste years figuring out on your own how to turn the oven on when, in a second or two, an experienced chef can show you?



## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

Below you will find concepts and techniques that I have found helpful to the audio actor and director. Those aspects of the acting craft that require volumes of their own receive mention here but not full explication; for that you need special training. But most of all, you need experience. The best way to learn to act is to do it. I go so far as to assert that experience should precede any formal training. I have found that inexperienced actors, having no basis on which to ground themselves in principles or techniques, tend to distrust their teachers, directors, and coaches, or not to understand them at all.

Therefore, my best advice to the fledgling actor is to perform whenever you get the chance, preferably with people with more skill and experience than you have. They will teach you, if only by example and by motivating you to hold your own with them. If you're any good at all, you will rise to the occasion.

### **Technique**

Training and practice of vocal production gains you the control and discipline to harness your phrasing and power. The methods by which you, the actor, exercise control and discipline is what's called "technique." Mastery of technique prevents you from performing below a certain level. The greater your mastery, the higher the level. On a good day, you may soar much higher than that level. On a bad day, you will never sink below it.

The tools of voice technique may seem obvious to some, but ought to be stated, if not as a new concept, as a reminder. I've noticed that the majority of American actors under-utilize all they have available to them. The most important for audio drama are: breath, duration, timbre or tone, volume, pace, articulation (movement of the lips, tongue, teeth, and palate), diction (intelligibility), range (highs and lows of pitch), tempo, rhythm, cadence (patterns of pitch, tempo and rhythm), and phrasing.

The only way to master technique is to gain plenty of practice in front of a mike, camera, and audience. Technique should become second nature so that you can concentrate fully on the unique demands of the individual play in which you are performing.

### **Accents**

Unless you intend to specialize in contemporary, regional roles, you need to master the so-called mid-Atlantic accent, the preferred pronunciation of the American language. When somebody tells you that you have no accent, it actually means that you speak mid-Atlantic. This standard accent entails more than precise articulation and prescribed pronunciations. It rids your voice of qualities — throatiness, nasality, adenoids, special inflections, etc. — that give your voice a particularly contemporary sound. For instance, Southerners have a way of inflecting statements as if they were questions that gained wide-spread usage among American youth in the 1990s. To play Shakespeare using that statement/question cadence would strike the listener as anachronistic. Mid-Atlantic makes you eligible to play a variety of roles in a variety of styles set in a variety of periods and places.

Learning certain other accents — as well as remaining able to revert to your original one when necessary — adds to your versatility. The most commonly called upon are "high" British, Cockney, a generic Southern U.S. drawl, "stage" Irish, Continental (a generalized sort of Eastern European), French, German, and Russian.

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### Energy

Discipline yourself to control your energy. You do not want to play listlessly, but neither do you want to play at full throttle throughout a production. If you begin at top energy, you not only have nowhere to build, but you are likely to poop out before the final curtain. This does not mean turning the knob to one setting and leaving it there for the duration. Instead, you ought to husband your strength to play the waxing and waning tensions appropriately. You may even have to compensate for the author's lack of such variations.

### Timing

Timing, a matter of experience and instinct, is critical, particularly in comedy. Recently, I directed a comic Sherlock Holmes pastiche in which Watson admonishes Holmes for his addiction to cocaine. In his long speech, Watson grows very warm about the dangers of the poison to the system and all the damage it can do. At the conclusion, we have this exchange:

HOLMES. Cigar?

WATSON. Don't mind if I do.

Of course, the joke is that tobacco is pretty deadly stuff in its own right and that neither Holmes nor the Doctor, who should know better, abstain. Our Holmes, unmoved, interrupts Watson's impassioned speech with his single word offer. Without skipping a beat, Watson did a one-eighty and cheerfully accepted. The two then leisurely lit and puffed away on their smokes. The bit got a laugh, because of the timing – big speech, two quick phrases, pause.

The kind of interruption that Holmes committed is called “topping.” To “top” another actor, you interrupt sharply at a slightly louder volume. You bring the volume down smoothly and quickly as you continue on. So the topping may consist of just your first syllable. In an argument that must build to a climax, your entire line may be hotter, and the next line even hotter still.

The pause afterward is equally important, if only to give the joke a second to register with the audience. To have come in right away with the next line would have been to “step on the laugh.” You must briefly “hold for the laugh.” This is easier in front of a studio audience. You can freeze after a punch line or do a take. If you hear the laugh coming, you wait until it crests and as it begins to subside, you continue. Doing this notifies the audience that they won't miss anything by reacting, thus encouraging them to laugh more at the next joke. Without the studio audience, you can only guess where the laughs will lie. If you hold too long, you could destroy the pace of the scene.

Bringing your line in at exactly the right time is as important in drama as it is in comedy. A good rule of thumb: Deliver your line on the “operative word” of the line that cues it. That is, use the word or phrase that motivates your response, rather than the word that ends the preceding speech, as your cue, even if it means overlapping. Now, whether that motivating word or phrase demands an immediate response or a pause depends on the circumstances. You may want to avoid stepping on a laugh, for instance. Know, however, that generally in audio drama, cues are better tight.

Or, you may want to use a “stage wait.” A stage wait is a kind of brief suspension of the action to heighten suspense. It can be audible. In old melodrama, for example, playwrights

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over-used certain clichés to create stage waits, tiny delays of the punch line or “pay-off” that the audience had been led to anticipate.

“You mean....?”

“Why, yes.”

More often stage waits are unscripted silent gaps. Remember this snatch of dialogue from the original *King Kong*?

DENHAM. Ever hear of...Kong?

CAPTAIN. Why...yes. Some sort of native superstition, isn't it?

The Captain's line is a scripted stage wait. Denham's pause before he says “Kong” is an unscripted suspense-creating pause contributed by the actor and director. Pauses are particularly powerful in audio drama. A short one sounds long. A long one seems endless. Some actors leave big gaping holes at almost all of their punctuation points, which creates “dead air,” meaningless silence. Use pauses judiciously. A weak “attack” — an attack is the way you begin a line — has the effect of a pause, as does getting the line in late.

### Phrasing

Timing is just one aspect of phrasing, a subject too few American actors give much attention to. Effective phrasing conveys meaning, keeps long speeches from sounding like a mere string of unrelated phrases, and conveys much of the esthetic value, imagery, and dramatic thrust imbedded in the lines. And sometimes, with a weak script, phrasing can disguise the weaknesses. Phrasing consists of knowing what thoughts to join together, where to put emphases, where to take breaths, what pace, rhythm, and melody to use to bring the overt and subtextual meaning home to the listener. Even simple statements require attention to phrasing.

“What's that up in the road ahead?” v. “What's that up in the road, a head?”

“What's for dinner tonight, mother?” v. “What's for dinner tonight? Mother?”

Shakespeare makes this plain with the “rude mechanicals” in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These amateur actors do not know how to phrase. In his prologue, Peter Quince, equally maladroit as playwright and actor, recites:

If we offend, it is with our good will.

That you should think, we come not to offend,

But with good will. To show our simple skill,

That is the true beginning of our end.

Consider then, we come but in despite.

We do not come, as minding to content you,

Our true intent is. All for your delight,

We are not here. That you should repent you,

The actors are at hand: and, by their show,

You should know all, that you are like to know.

On this, a viewer remarks, “Indeed he hath played on this prologue like a child on a recorder — a sound, but not in government.”

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### **Narration**

Nowhere is phrasing more important than in extended narration. I recommend that every would-be narrator study recordings of the two great narrators of 1940s American radio drama — Jackson Beck, who narrated Superman, and Fred Foy, who provided the same function on The Lone Ranger. Neither will it kill you to seek out performances by today's four top English-language audiobook narrators — Edward Hermann, Martin Jarvis, Miriam Margolyes, and Barbara Rosenblat.

There are two approaches to narration that I have found superb for audio drama:

Story telling is perhaps the more vivid style. Pretend you are not reading from a script. You are extemporaneously recounting events that you witnessed, researched, or heard about to a small group of acquaintances. If the narration is delivered by a character, then it is not you who is telling the story, but the character. Otherwise, it is you, Jane Doe, wanting to make the events and their significance come alive for your auditors. Story telling works best with action-filled or first-person narration.

The Author/Narrator is the more intimate and personal style. In this approach, you are neither reading nor story telling. You are playing a character named The Author. And you are in a play about this author reading his own work to a favorite relative as you both sit in comfortable chairs of an evening before a cozy hearth fire. This works best for extended narration with a strong authorial voice. A Dickens adaptation, for instance.

In both cases you play to imagined listeners. With second-person narration, which had a vogue in old radio and pulp fiction, you speak to one or more of the characters. You are an inner voice, an alter-ego.

### **Character Acting and Character Voices**

Character Acting and Character Voices are related but not the same thing. The former refers to an acting specialty in which the outward mannerisms of character are emphasized. Frequently a character man or woman refers to actors too old to play romantic parts. The term “character voice” refers to cartoon-like vocal characterization, the exaggeration or caricature of speech styles, often for comic effect. Both take special training or experience, although, I observe, if you haven't screwed with your voice when a child as a form of play, you will have a nearly impossible time perfecting character voices.

### **Observation**

Perhaps the most important part of technique is keen eyes and ears, of watching and listening sensitively and receptively to our fellow humans. With acute awareness we gradually become aware of what is characteristic or memorable in our fellow creatures, data we can file away for future reference. Haven't you heard of actors doing research in this way or done so yourself? Recalled the memory of a family member or acquaintance who so resembles the character we're playing? Hung about with cops, hillbillies, politicians, whores, et al., in order to play one? If not, you should begin doing so.

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### “Attitudinalizing”

Observation and impersonation should be non-judgmental. The playwright judges, the audience judges, the actor should not. You can’t get into a character’s skin if you are outside it deciding whether you like or dislike, sympathize with or disapprove of what the character is and does. For instance, on more than one occasion, I’ve seen actors weep playing a pitiable character in a pitiful situation. In that case, it was Socrates at his trial saying that his death would be no misfortune. The actor playing Socrates wept out of pity. But Socrates meant what he said. He did NOT weep. That’s called *attitudinalizing* and it’s a no-no.

### Playing Organically

Technique is not enough. When you just go through the motions as an actor, putting on the outward display of character and emotion, you are said to be indicating. It is usually better to draw upon your own emotional reserves than to fake it, even in a comedy. The audience may think, “There, for the grace of God, go I,” but the actor thinks “Here I go.” Rather than pretend you’re the character, turn yourself into the character. Dig into your own psyche to locate the correspondences between your inner life and the character’s.

Authenticity comes — not from imitating the outward manifestations of a person you have observed — but by identifying with the character you are playing and placing yourself in his situation. Without your doing so, theatrical truth, the sense that the fictive world of the play resonates with real life, is impossible.

This “organic” approach requires considerable discipline. Without discipline and the imposition of technique, you can either flail about or internalize so much that you exhibit nothing at all to the audience and other players. It’s almost as if you have to split yourself into two people — the one identifying with the character, and the other monitoring and directing the performance.

Some authorities teach what they call “emotional recall.” If your character weeps, gets mad, laughs, or whatever, remember something that once made you weep, get mad or laugh, and play it. The trouble with emotional recall is that it separates you from your character and the world of the play even more than indication does. One vital aspect of theater is its tense. Whenever the action is supposed to take place, it unfolds in the here-and-now right in front of the audience. Its quality of the present tense gives theater its immediacy and vitality. Emotional recall occurs in another time and place than does the play, draining it of immediacy and removing part of the performer’s essence to another location.

Playing organically also means gaining experience outside the theater, observing, participating in, and taking personal risks in real life. How can you play someone who has loved and lost if you don’t know what it feels like, much less what it looks like? Traditional theater wisdom has it that virgins can’t act. I hold that “virgins,” in the sense of those whose life experience is very narrow, can’t act. Many, if not most, of us who enter the theater world are persecuted freaks outside it. Naturally we want to cloister within the culture we best understand and best understands us. That’s what makes this aspect of professional acting perhaps the most difficult. Nevertheless, we just can’t afford, professionally, to limit ourselves. Which brings us to the subject of...

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### **Risk**

Good acting takes courage. It's not just that you have to deal with constant rejection in your career (the main cause of all our narcissistic disorders). You have to risk failure every time you approach the mike, step on stage or go before the camera. If you are unwilling to make a fool out of yourself, stay out of the business. A professional actor can't afford dignity.

### **Ensemble**

You cannot "play against" your fellow actors fully unless you remain in the present tense. Theater people talk of playing against one another, for acting upon and reacting to cast mates feels like a competitive game like tennis, volleyball, or fencing (the latter provides excellent physical and mental training for actors, by the way.) Playing together in this way contributes a sense of ensemble to a production, a unification of elements — acting and reacting "in the moment," giving and taking, spontaneity and vitality. Everything the other actors do makes you look good. Everything you do makes them look good.

Alert to the nuances of the other voices in the scene, you can often feel the vibes they're tossing at you. These vibes stimulate your emotional equipment, triggering a spontaneous, organic response, which in turn will feed the actors you're in the scene with. (I might add that it is a very pleasant sensation!) When you do the opposite, listen only for your cue and then recite your line without regard to whoever else is at the mike with you, you are said to be "playing in a vacuum." The listener can hear the difference.

### **Trust**

Key to ensemble is trust. You have to trust your cast mates, your director, the sound guy, everybody involved in the production upon whom the success of your performance depends, and who, in turn, have to depend on you. I once studied with a coach who illustrated trust, and the need for it, by falling backwards at arbitrary moments during class, trusting that alert students would rush to catch him before he cracked his head open on the concrete floor. He wasn't training himself to trust us, but sensitizing us to be worthy of each other's trust.

He also used a great exercise for building ensemble. After arranging us in a wide circle, he had us toss an imaginary baseball back and forth to each other. You can't throw the ball until you've caught it, you can't catch it if you haven't been paying attention to its flight through the group. Try it sometime with your cast mates and see if it improves things.

### **Mannerisms**

Mannerisms are the opposite of what I've been advocating. Like indication, of which it is a sub-species, it is technique made hollow by complaisance or anxiety. In the mistaken belief that they're doing things correctly, some actors purposely substitute an arsenal of stock speech patterns for ones that are fresh and that fit the thoughts and emotions being portrayed (William Shatner leaps to mind). Such mannerisms can sound attractive; more often they sound pretentious. Further, they get in the way of the lines. Play for meaning. Avoid mannerisms, however good they may sound to you.

### **Small Parts**

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Of course, almost all of what I've been mentioning applies to major roles. Still, you can't do a walk-on by just walking on. Whatever the size or nature of the role you're playing, you have to enter into the fictive world of the play to some degree. "There are no small parts, only small actors," the saying goes. Commitment is never absent in the theater, sonic or otherwise.

### Mike Technique

#### Presence

Mike "presence" is analogous to "stage presence," an indescribable mixture of qualities that projects a compelling personality and makes the actor look like he belongs naturally behind the footlights. You acquire presence partly by learning how to negotiate your way around a stage – how much volume to use to be heard, how to walk properly through a door, how to sit in a short skirt, how to stand and gesture so as not to block your face or the other actors, how to "give" and "take" stage. The greater part comes intuitively over time as you gain performing experience, and only after you have so mastered the basics that you don't have to think about them any more; they just kick in naturally. That is why nobody can say exactly what presence is, but everybody can recognize it when they see it.

In such a way, you acquire mike presence in part consciously by learning technique and in part intuitively as you gain experience. Below you will find advice about the teachable stuff. As for the other, I can only think of two principles that can help you:

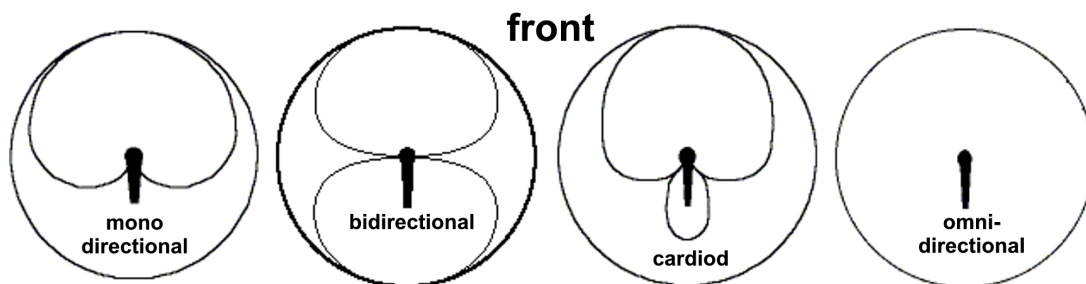
If you cannot actually be confident at the mike, fake it. Hold your head erect, whistle a happy tune and no one will suspect.... etc. Ninety-percent of presence comes from confidence or a reasonable facsimile.

#### Practice

Get in front of a mike as often as you can. Listen to what you have recorded and critique it as objectively as possible.

### Giving and Taking Mike

Part of acquiring presence is learning the equivalent of what's called "giving stage" and "taking stage" — drawing attention to yourself and relinquishing attention when appropriate.



In audio drama, taking mike is a matter of coming in with your line with appropriate strength, neither too much nor too little. Giving mike just means shutting up, except when you are performing in front of a studio audience. In that instance, you can help the audience focus by also focusing your own attention on the important speakers and by remaining fairly still. As long as

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you remain on stage and the audience can see you, giving stage in this way is important to the success of the production.

### Warning

Hearing your recorded voice for the first time will shock or dismay you. You will sound tinny and irritating to yourself. In fact, you may never get used to listening to your own voice. When you hear yourself speak while you are speaking, you hear your voice as it resonates through your entire skeletal system. As a result you sound more resonant and sonorous to yourself than you do to others. You hear your recorded voice the way other people hear you, without the benefit of bone vibrations. Quite a humbling experience.

At one time, radio announcers learned a trick of cupping a hand around one side of their faces so that their voices would travel from their mouths up their palms to their ears. Thus they could hear themselves more accurately than usual. Nowadays audio performers just wear “cans” (i.e., earphones) while they work. But when rehearsing at home, using the old hand-to-the-ear ploy still is useful.

### Mike Patterns

Numerous kinds of microphones exist, with various response characteristics, patterns, and purposes, some made especially for musical instruments, sounds, singing, and spoken word. What you as an actor need to concern yourself with are the various mike patterns, the invisible fields around the mike wherein you can best be heard. Basically, you will encounter five of these.



**Mono- or unidirectional.** Best for tracking one actor per mike. The field extends outward in one direction. Usually the field can be narrowed to avoid leakage from one mike to the next or broadened to give the actor some flexibility to move his or her head.

**Bidirectional.** Helpful when two actors share a mike. The pick-up field emanates outward in a figure eight.

**Cardioid or heart-shaped pattern.** Can — not very comfortably — accommodate three actors.

**Omnidirectional** can hear in a full 360 degrees. In theory. Actually, there are usually two “dead spots” to watch out for. Omnis are handy for “area micing,” using one mike to pick up all the characters in a scene, rather than one mike for each or several mics for groups.

**Stereo mikes** can also hear in a nearly 360 degree pattern.

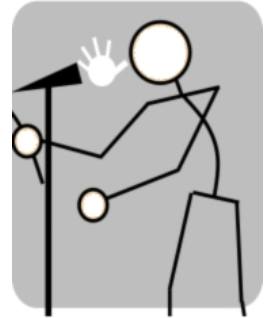
Employing one mike for each actor is called “close micing.” It has the advantage of maximizing your and the engineer’s control over how you sound. It has the disadvantage of requiring more skill from you to moderate your audible breathing and prevent popping.

### Mike Position

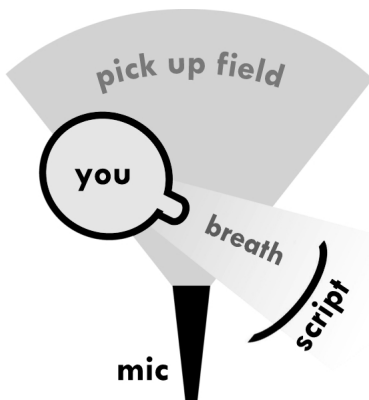


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At the top of a recording session, the engineer will “get a level,” that is, he’ll have you speak so that he can adjust the mike volume and position for optimal pick-up. He may even “spike” your position on the floor with tape or chalk. Generally, you need six to eight inches between the mike and your mouth. To check for yourself, open your hand and spread your fingers. When the tip of your little finger just touches the business end of the mike, the tip of your thumb should touch your mouth. When you need to raise your voice, you should back slightly away from the mike; when you speak softly, feint into it.



Note that when you get close to the mike, the “proximity effect” kicks in, making you sound particularly warm. Therefore, intimate scenes or internal monologue are often performed in a tight mike position. Feinting — that is, adjusting mike position for changes in volume or for warmth — takes a great deal of practice. Some voice artists (e.g., the legendary Ken Nordine) are famous for their ability to “make love to” the mike.



Do not talk directly into the mike. Talk across the field. To facilitate this, hold your script up so that, in order to read it, you have to aim your mouth across, under or over the microphone. You will thereby avoid popping.

If you can, stand, don’t sit, at the mike. Standing improves concentration and energy. Also, stand still. Doing so not only prevents random volume or stereo changes, but channels your energy up and out your mouth. Gesticulating with your free hand, which many actors like to do, only diffuses energy. I wish it were needless to say, but experience suggests you must be admonished to keep from rattling change in your pocket or fidgeting with anything else on your person. In fact, get rid of anything you wear that tinkles, shakes, rattles or rolls. Wear soft clothes, especially soft-soled shoes, unless your director wants you to do your own footfall effects.

You don’t have to be heard in the last row of a thousand-seat playhouse. Use only as much volume as you need to be heard by the character or characters you are speaking to. Notice I said “character,” not “fellow actor.” The actor may only be a few feet away, but the character is supposed to be on the other side of a chasm. You never play to the actor — or the mike, for that matter. You play to characters in an environment you conjure in your mind, not to anything or anyone in the sound studio. What is your proximity to these fictional people? Are you in a noisy or quiet place? Is it stuffy or bad smelling or hot or breezy? All these things affect your delivery.

### The Most Important Principle

This brings up the most important principle of acting for audio. Your job is to stimulate sights and smells and sensations in the imagination of your audience. You can’t do this unless you create them in your own mind for yourself while you’re performing. Remember what it was like playing make-pretend with the other neighborhood kids? Making fallen branches serve as

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swords and porches as castle turrets? Well, that's exactly what acting in audio plays is all about, just more so.

### **On- and Off-Mike**

A small distance goes a long way. To give the effect that you are leaving the scene — or to “go off-mike,” as we say — you need only turn your head away from the mike. To fade up, you need only do the opposite. In audio drama, unless your director is striving for a specific effect, no character moves in silence. To give the effect of a move, you need to move on or off mike or across the stereo field while you're talking. Otherwise, you will sound as if you have jumped to a new position. And unless the script or director tells you otherwise, assume you are supposed to be in an “on mike” position, that is, standing in relation to the mike for the maximum pick-up of your voice with maximum isolation and “slap” from the walls.

It's slap — your voice bouncing off the walls and ceiling back into the mike — that gives you the “off-mike” sound. It betokens distance even more than changes in volume. You need to compromise on such changes anyway as the mike exaggerates them. Get too loud, and your voice will get distorted. Speak too softly and you won't be heard at all. That is why you need to practice a style of delivery that keeps dynamics smooth. Some actors hit the top of a sentence hard and peter out at the end or vice versa. Some have a jerky dynamic. Those styles don't work well at the mike. Smoothness does.

Hence, changes in dynamic effects should be accomplished more by changes in voice quality than volume. If your character is supposed to shout, close your throat a bit the way people do when they shout and only raise your voice slightly. If you're supposed to whisper, get breathy but adjust your volume only slightly. And, as already stated, when supposedly moving, adjust your head to increase slap rather than to decrease your actual volume.

In monophonic productions, it's conventional that when anybody enters or leaves a scene they fade up or down, go on- or off-mike. The problem is that outdoors there is no slap, for sound can't bounce off walls that aren't there. The best studios have a “dead room” for outdoor scenes, a space within or adjacent to the main room that is baffled to eliminate slap. In the United States, such spaces are rare to non-existent apart from certain facilities for post-production film sound. Therefore, handling movement in outdoor scenes can be very tricky even when tracked outdoors. You may have to adjust volume while remaining still to sound distant or create the illusion of movement.

### **Working before a Studio Audience**

When performing before a studio audience, you “address” the mike differently. You must “uncover to the house,” that is, position yourself so that the audience gets a good look at you. The mike must always be downstage of you. When you have it all to yourself, just face the audience. When two of you share a bi-directional mike, you should stand on opposite sides of it, with the leg farthest from it slightly further downstage than the closer one. A third actor would be in the middle facing the house.

Normally, even when amplified, you have to play to the studio rather than the home audience, employing enough volume to penetrate to the back of the house. And keep your script, which you should hold in your downstage hand, low enough so as not to block your face. A stage

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manager/floor director may be present, usually audience level or off to the side, who will direct you with hand signals. Memorize the signals shown in these pages and learn to keep an eye on the director without losing your place in the script, the way musicians watch a conductor. This takes considerable practice.

### **Script Management**

Before you begin work, remove any brads, paper clips, or other binders from your script. Unbound scripts are easier to turn silently than bound ones. Once upon a time, you could discard script pages simply by dropping them to the floor. But paper soft enough for that is hard to come by these days. Turning script pages silently takes practice. Here's what I recommend:

Bring to the mike only those pages you must deal with at the moment. Hold them in one hand, with your thumb pressed into the sheets enough to make them curve toward you slightly at the top and bottom. This keeps them from flopping over. Before you near the bottom of a page, carefully use your opposite hand to separate the top page from the others. Lift the single sheet off the pile well before you're finished reading it so that you can transition effortlessly to the top of the next sheet. Then as you're reading that, you can take the first one and silently slip it to the bottom of the pile.

Perchance you will be given a padded music stand for your script. This eases your silent page turnings. All you have to do is lift the page slightly and slide it out of your way. However, stands also contribute a danger. If you speak into the stand, the reverberations can add unwanted overtones to your voice. So, you still have to be careful, just about something else.

### **Some Important Random Tips**

**Pace.** Listeners experience audio time as slower than real, stage or film time.

Therefore, to give the impression of real time, talk faster than normal. Phrasing and cueing are of utmost importance to keep the play from dragging, to give it a sense of momentum and mounting tension. Pauses are potent tools to be used sparingly. A short pause feels like a long one. It's no accident that playwright Harold Pinter developed his famous pregnant pauses in the radio plays he wrote for the BBC early in his career.

**Plosives.** Plosives are consonants — p, b, t, etc. — that cause you to expel air explosively. The mike is not kind to these sounds, especially when they are close miced. These sounds are liable to “pop” — that is, to make an explosive sound. To control popping, you need not only to master mike technique, but also to moderate your airflow when making plosive sounds.

**Sibilants.** Glassy “s” sounds, such as the Lessac method teaches, are to be avoided at the mike. They irritate like fingernails on a blackboard. Women in particular must guard against such sibilants, because many are brought up to think they're feminine and desirable, a trend that, fortunately, is waning.

**Smoothness.** Smooth volume tracks more intelligibly than rough, staccato, or choppy delivery. Don't, as some actors tend to do, swallow the first or last syllables of sentences or speeches; doing so not only muddies the sense of the lines, but interferes with the dramatic flow of scenes.

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**Staying in Character.** Don't stop acting just because you've stopped talking. There are good reasons for this. Dropping out of character between lines means that you probably will not be ready for your next line. You will lose momentum. You will be more in character at the end of your next speech than at the beginning of it, when you should be fully engaged throughout the whole thing. Moreover, your "vibes" feed your fellow performers. They play off you when you're silent as much as when you're gabby. Not only that, but in character you may react to the other guy's lines with an audible grunt or other vocalization that pops out spontaneously, thus adding richness to the scene and further feeding your cast mates.

Temper spontaneous non-verbal vocalizations with technique. Remember the principle of giving and taking mike as explained above. Avoid muddying scenes.

**Eye Contact.** Don't try to establish eye contact with the other players. Instead, listen hard. Respond only to what you hear. Your interlocutors may deliver a line accompanied by a physical gesture or facial expression; the combined vocal and visual effect may communicate a meaning that neither element would alone. Your listeners cannot appreciate the total effect, so, if you respond to it, you will confuse them. Therefore, you must play against the sound only.

**Mouth and Belly Noises.** Close mic'ing aggravates mouth noises. Those accompanying dry mouth can easily be avoided by adequate rest before a session, and remedied with a drink of water. (For that and other reasons, it's a good idea to have fresh water handy in the studio.) Other mouth noises, especially those produced by dentures, are harder to get rid of. The only real fix is producing enough voice to overwhelm them. Stomach rumblings bother narrators working alone at a single mike more than actors working in a group, though some lower GIs growl loud enough to be heard even then. Proper diet plus sufficient rest helps prevent noisy pipes. Otherwise, there's not much you can do about it, except wait until the plumbing quiets down.

### **Warming Up**

It's essential for your health and the quality of your performance that you warm up before every rehearsal and performance. Fifteen to 20 minutes of exercises before every rehearsal and performance revs up your "instrument." They prepare you mentally and physically for work. Some actors use yoga. I find that yoga makes me drowsy, when I need heightened alertness. Instead I begin with a few neck rolls and deep knee bends to get the blood flowing. I might even repeat them midway through a long session to loosen up after hours of motionless concentration. Follow the neck rolls with a few breathing exercises and then some vocalizing.

### **Breathing Exercises**

Breathing exercises not only help build control, but also help you relax. Here are three.

#### **Breathing Exercise 1**

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1. Sit upright in a comfortable, high-backed chair. Lean back and feel the chair take the weight of your back. Let your hands lie loosely in your lap, palms upwards. Take your shoes off and put both feet firmly on the floor, with your legs in a comfortable, non-crossed position.
2. Close your eyes and consciously slow down your breathing – in and out, slowly and deeply. Focus on each of the parts of your body in turn, working upwards from your feet, and tense each group of muscles and then relax completely, so you feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Breathe deeply and slowly at a natural speed and, with eyes closed, gradually become aware of your lungs filling and emptying inside your chest.
3. Put your hands on your lower rib cage, over the diaphragm. Have your fingertips just touching. Breathe slowly in through your mouth and try to feel your lower-chest fill with air, your fingertips should move apart from each other. Hold the breath for a second, then let it out slowly through a half open mouth on a quiet, gentle ‘haaaah’ sound. Do this several times.
4. Check how your neck, shoulders and face are feeling. Do a few large movements to loosen face and throat muscles, pretend to chew food if necessary. Then do 2 ‘neck rolls’; drop your head to your chest and gently roll it first to one side and then the other, then to the front again. Bring your head upright again and shrug your shoulders tightly up to your ears. Relax
5. Rub around your neck and throat to loosen any tightness.

### **Breathing Exercise #2**

1. Inhale at a steady pace through your nose for four beats.
2. Hold your breath for two.
3. Exhale through your nose for four.
4. Hold for two.
5. Inhale again four beats through your nose.
6. Hold for two.
7. This time exhale four beats through your mouth.
8. Hold for two.
9. Inhale through your mouth four beats.
10. Hold for two.
11. Exhale through your nose four beats.
12. Hold for two.
13. Inhale through your mouth four beats.
14. Hold for two.
15. Exhale through your mouth four beats.

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16. Repeat at least four times, more if you can do it.

### **Breathing Exercise #3.**

Take a deep breath. At a moderately slow tempo, begin counting aloud in a conversational volume. If you can reach 60 in one breath, you have sufficient lung power for most acting purposes. With practice, you should be able to reach 100 in one breath.

### **Vocalizing**

Calisthenics for your jaw, tongue, lips, and voice box strengthen your entire vocal apparatus and bring them under your control. I've heard numerous vocal warm-ups. My routine consists of five steps:

#### **Vocalization 1**

In one breath, recite the five vowels rapidly with a consonant in front of each. Change consonants and do it again. Go through the whole alphabet in this way.

“...bee bee bah bah boe boe boo boo — see see sah sah soe soe soo soo, dee dee dah dah doe doe doo doo...” (etc.)

Work for accuracy of the vowel sounds. Clean vowels are essential for intelligibility.

#### **Vocalization 2**

Recite a tongue twister or two. I use this verse by Edith Sitwell, which is spoken rapidly in a sing-song to the rhythm of a sailor's hornpipe:

Sailors come to the drum  
Out of Babylon; hobby-horses  
Foam, the dumb sky rhinoceros-glum  
Watched the courses of the breakers' rocking-horses and with Glaucis,  
Lady Venus on the settee of the horsehair sea!  
Where Lord Tennyson in laurels wrote a gloria free,  
In a borealic iceberg came Victoria; she  
Knew Prince Albert's tall memorial took the colors of the floreal  
And the borealic iceberg; floating on they see  
New-arisen Madam Venus for whose sake from far  
Came the fat and zebra'd emperor from Zanzibar,  
Where like golden bouquets lay far Asia, Africa, Cathay,  
All laid before that shady lady by the fibroid Shah....

Gilbert and Sullivan patter songs, spoken rhythmically and quickly rather than sung, also work well. I use this one from *Pirates of Penzance*:

I am the very model of a modern Major-General,  
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical  
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;

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I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical,  
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,  
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse.  
I'm very good at integral and differential calculus;  
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous:  
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

Now that you have limbered up your lungs, lips, tongue, and jaw, oil the vocal chords by singing no more than a song or two. It should have a wide pitch range like The National Anthem. I use "Summertime" from Porgy and Bess.

Do all the vocalizations in a strong voice. But don't overdo it. You don't want to make yourself hoarse. That's why 20 minutes of this stuff is plenty — though less than ten doesn't accomplish much.

## **When Your Voice Gets Sick**

Back in Chicago, I could always tell which of my friends was in a show. They all had colds from the drafty dressing rooms. You can't afford to fall prey to bugs that get in your voice's way. Sick or not, the show must go on. There are no understudies in audio drama. Here are some common afflictions and ways to diminish their symptoms.

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### **Dryness**

Sip water, especially first thing in the morning, if your throat is dry – swallowing regularly helps to relieve the symptoms.

Suck sweets – not menthol or acid drops, since these may cause coughing (harsh on the throat).

Inhale steam.

Carry a small thermos flask of hot water – cup hands around the top and inhale steam very gently, otherwise it may cause coughing .

Take a Turkish bath; use a steam room; take a hot shower.

Avoid too much tea, coffee or wine – these have a drying effect.

### **Phlegm**

Excessive phlegm, post nasal drip from rhinitis, hay fever, other allergies, and colds/flu can cause croaking voice, intermittent “breaks” in pitch, or voice “disappearances.”

Clear throat quietly and gently – it is better to take longer to clear the throat by doing it gently rather than ‘smacking’ the vocal chords together with one loud throat clear.

Swallow mucus/phlegm if possible if it drips down the back of the throat rather than trying to bring it up to spit it out.

Avoid milky products – these can increase phlegm production (goat’s milk, Silk and skimmed milk are good alternatives to whole milk).

### **Cough**

Excessive loud coughing can traumatize (damage) the delicate surface of the vocal chords, since the chords strike together too firmly and sharply. Also, excessive coughing may cause your throat to constrict a little, thereby adversely affecting your voice quality.

Cough as quietly as possible.

To stop a coughing fit, swallow saliva and keep swallowing until you inhibit the cough.

Drink water to soothe the throat only at the end of the coughing fit otherwise the water may go down the wrong way and make you cough more.

### **Bad Stomach**

Gastric reflux (this can sometimes occur when you are not aware of it). Acid regurgitation (gastric reflux) actually burns the mucosal lining of the throat. Acid can also find its way down onto the vocal chords. This usually causes coughing and burns the lining of the chords, making them feel sore and dry.

The best solution is to seek medical advice from your doctor. You may have a disorder, such as an hiatal hernia, that requires medical attention and a certain regimen of care. In the meantime, dissolving an indigestion tablet on the tongue may help to relieve the symptoms.

Sip water to relieve the dryness in the mouth and throat.



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Sucking a mild cough drop may help to relieve symptoms in the throat.

If the voice feels uncomfortable or sounds hoarse, reduce talking until you can control the reflux through medication.

Avoid spicy, indigestible foods.

Cold-like discomfort, such as swollen glands, dizziness, headache, sore throat.

Sip a cup of “actor’s toddy” at dinner and bedtime, consisting of hot tea, a tablespoon of honey, and a jigger of scotch, rum, or brandy.

I’ve found that wrapping a warm scarf loosely around my neck helps mitigate the effects of a scratchy throat.

Rest.

### **One Final Note**

You may have noticed that some models, rock stars, dancers, comedians, and sports figures — e.g. Will Smith, Leslie Caron, Chuck Connors, Cameron Diaz, Bill Cosby, Chris Kristofferson — can and do jump into acting successfully with little or no training. You may also have noticed the number of thriving actors who, according to the tenets of formal training, do everything wrong and get away with it. You may also observed players with excellent technique, versatility, imagination and talent who languish in undeserved obscurity. So why, you may have asked yourself, do we need the demanding rules and regimen of formal stage craft?

Theater consists of numerous ingredients, many combinations of which produce salutary results. All “rules” can be broken now and then to advantage. This is a dangerous thing to tell novices, so you rarely hear it from us “experts.” Nonetheless, it’s true. You should think of the concepts and methods recommended here less as rules than as helpful time-tested guides. You cannot afford to ignore or disregard them. You cannot break the rules unless you know what they are and what they’re for. The success of famed acting interlopers demonstrates the efficacy of talent and opportunity, not the worthlessness of training and technique. It does point up something else that teachers rarely mention — namely, that you need the discipline to free yourself from technique when required and that you should never adhere slavishly to it.

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# EIGHT

## Casting

### Preparation

#### Learn Your Talent Pool

The casting call is an imperfect way to cast a play. You can glean only so much from listening to an audition. Some actors cannot audition well; others perform well only at auditions. Matters such as professionalism, depth, range, versatility and compatibility with you can only be hinted at during a call. Get around the community of talent available to you. Patronize the theater in your town. Note the actors you admire. Invite them to audition for you. Familiarize yourself with the casting customs of your community. How do you reach the talent, through their agents, unions, or personal contact? How do you let people know you are looking for talent?

By far, the most effective way to cast is to invite the actors that you want to play the roles you need to fill. Only when you have the most thorough knowledge of the talent base available to you, can you do this effectively.

#### Working with a Casting Professional

Casting agents do not actually cast, they filter. They supposedly have the knowledge and structure to create breakdowns, contact talent reps, and schedule a general call. They weed through the pix and resumés agents have submitted, choose likely candidates, and schedule audition appointments. They often conduct and record the auditions, which you may or may not attend. After you and your producer review the recordings, they schedule any call-backs you require, and make necessary contractual arrangements with agents for the actors you've cast.

You as producer and/or director may be your own casting director; or you may have one or more casting persons on staff, or may out-source a casting pro for this production. You may think it best to engage a casting agent when recruiting star talent from outside the local area. Different protocols obtain in different communities. Whatever they may be where you live, nothing beats having your own well-researched talent rolodex. Even if you hold an "open" call (a casting call open to all comers), your rolodex provides back-up. I have usually tried to cast a mix of my reliables and actors who are new to me. In this way I continue to build my personal talent pool, while relying on stalwarts whom I know can cut the mustard.

Do everything you can to reduce stress for the auditioning talent. Actors cannot do their best when overly anxious and tryouts wrack their nerves more than anything else in the business. You and everyone under your supervision whom you involve in the process should exhibit respect for the performers and the highest level of efficiency, courtesy and professionalism. Be prepared for stress yourself. Auditions tax you and your staff as well as the talent. In my career, I've had to deflect importunate actors who have tried to wheedle into auditions, call the cops to get a deranged auditionee out of my office, and tell more than a few that I, not they, are in charge.

### **Casting on the Fly**

You will find times when formal auditions are impractical, when you have to cast from your rolodex and/or recommendations, when you must invite actors to play roles without auditioning them. I've auditioned actors in their homes, in hospital rooms, and backstage. You may even have held formal calls only to find that you have to hunt for talent because of last minute cancellations. It is therefore important for you always to leave time for contingencies between casting and production. You shouldn't cast too far ahead of production. Indeed, it's best to cast as close to production as safely possible. The more time between the audition and the production, the more things can go awry. Yet, a contingency leeway is always advised.

### **Star Talent**

Rarely is it a good idea to hire actors with status higher than your own. They will know it and throw their weight around, if you're not careful. Still, talent with "marquee value" can lend your efforts instant prestige and credibility. Stars do not necessarily add to the quality of your production. Stars become stars for many reasons other than talent. Therefore, if you employ name talent, do so judiciously.

Be advised that the actors you see most often as guest stars on television have little marquee value, though employing them may gain you some credibility in industry circles. The public may recognize their faces, but will not know their names. There are two types of marquee names that do you good — the TV actors who star as regulars on popular TV shows and A List movie stars. As a rule of thumb, the more a star is perceived to be aloof and unattainable, the more good the name will do you.

How do you recruit such people? They all have agents and many have managers. You have many resources available to you for finding out who represents whom. Samuel French's Theatrical Bookstores (Hollywood, New York, London, and on-line) have several publications listing agents in their catalogue. *The Hollywood Reporter* has an annual issue listing celebrities and their reps. But the best way to reach star talent is by personal contact.

### **Talent Agents**

Good luck finding talent agents who will cooperate with you. As a rule, reps only care about money. If you do not pay enough to make it worth their time, they'll blow you off. The actor may be receptive to you while his agent is not. If you're lucky, some agents may play ball if they represent voice actors who have expressed interest in this kind of work; keeping clients happy in this way keeps clients from seeking representation elsewhere. If you must go through agents, make sure you go to the right ones. Many professional actors have separate agents for voice work and for all other work. Some have different agents on each coast and sometimes in the middle, too. Some have personal managers (often a lawyer or publicist) as well as licensed agents. If you don't have to deal with agents, don't do it. Personal contact with the desired actors always works best.

## Audition Materials

### Breakdowns and Casting Notices

The “breakdowns” for a production contain the following information:

- a list of the roles available with thumbnail descriptions
- the times, dates, places of auditions
- how and when to make audition appointments (usually the number to call and the dates and hours audition appointments will be taken)
- name of production and author
- names of producer or production company, casting director, director
- union auspices (AFTRA or non-union)
- pay scale (if there's no pay, you should mention it)
- restrictions, if any (I have always restricted casting to members of AFTRA, SAG, and Equity, and have had P.A.s check union cards at the door)

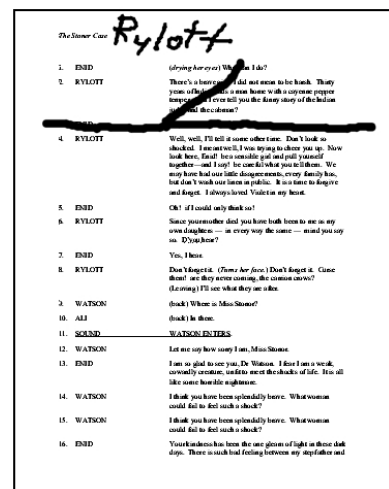
Breakdowns are particularly useful when casting through talent agents. The agents consult them and send you pictures and resumes of clients they think will fit the roles. You look these over to pick the actors who interest you and schedule their audition appointments with the agents. Breakdowns also form the basis of casting press releases, or may be sent to local pro media instead of or along with press releases.

A scaled-down version serves as a casting notice. Restricted to one 8½” x 11” page, these fliers go to places where actors hang out — playhouses, recording studios, pubs, AFTRA offices, etc. — where they can be posted on bulletin boards. Fold them into self-mailers for the actors on your talent rolodex. Word-of-mouth travels fast in the theater community. So getting notices directly to actors will net you the best results, for the performers who see them will inform others.

## Sides

Sides (always referred to in the plural) are abbreviated scripts you prepare specially for casting purposes. They include only the pages you want hopefuls to audition from. I like to have two sets, one that actors can read prior to the reading and one they must sight-read without preparation. For general calls (see below), choose sections of about two minutes in length. Sides for call-backs should be long enough to demonstrate the actors' ability to develop a scene. Sides of dialogue between two characters work better than sides of soliloquies or long speeches.

Actors may or may not choose to audition for specific characters. Therefore, sides for general auditions should be chosen to demonstrate actors' general abilities.



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### **Calendars, Sign-in Sheets**

You'll need a calendar to log in audition appointments and sign-in sheets for the audition dates. When making a calendar, allow yourself five-minute breaks every 20 minutes or so. Tryouts are grueling for auditioners as well as auditionees. [See HANDY FORMS below]

### **Pictures and Resumes**

Professional actors provide 8" x 10" head-shots stapled to resumes for submissions and auditioning purposes. In some communities, non professionals may also. I find them handy. The pictures help my memory. I make casting notes in the blank spaces of the resumes. They fit compactly in the talent drawer of the file cabinet.

When announcing auditions, I instruct interested actors and their agents to submit pictures and resumes. I review the submissions pretty much the way any prospective employer analyzes resumes to determine the extent of the applicant's relevant experience:

- ☐ Number of credits shows breadth of experience;
- ☐ Titles of the works tell you if the actor has performed in anything resembling the play(s) you are casting for;
- ☐ Names of the characters played reveal how prominent the actor's roles have been and if they've been similar to the parts you have open;
- ☐ Names of the producers, directors and theaters that actor has worked for will tell you how professional the applicant's experience is;
- ☐ Actors list special skills, such as accents, that you may be looking for;
- ☐ Union affiliation indicates a degree of professional standing.

### **Demos**

Actors may have voice demos on cassette or CD containing brief excerpts from their radio spots, narrations and air checks. You can use them to gauge voice quality and maybe proficiency with accents or funny voices, but very little about acting chops. For that you need to call talent in to audition.

### **Auditions**

Handle formal auditions in two steps: generals and call-backs. I recommend that you hold both in a sound studio where they can be recorded. You should also have a waiting area where talent can sign in and look over the sides before they audition. The waiting area should have ample seating, sign-in sheets, and copies of the sides and breakdowns. In the inner chamber where the players actually audition, no extraneous personnel should be present. You will need a P.A. (production assistant) to usher actors in and out and read against them, an engineer and whoever's in charge (casting director and/or producer and director). The larger the group observing the talent as they audition, the more stressed the hopeful becomes.

As mentioned above, you should record tryouts on professional equipment, preferably in the studio you will use to record the play. The actors slate their own takes — that is, before

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they begin reading, they should announce their name. If you are recording on conventional audio tape, an electronic slate tone should precede each reading; if recording on DAT, an electronic ID should precede them; if on a hard drive, the start time should be noted. Thus you can easily locate the track you want at a later time. In addition, the P.A. should note in order who's auditioning for what role in what play.

### **Generals**

The general or “cattle” call allows you to single out suitable candidates and eliminate unsuitable ones. When actors call to schedule appointments, they are asked to prepare a two-minute speech, complimentary in period and style to the play you are producing — if your play is a contemporary comedy, ask them to prepare a speech from a contemporary comedy of their choice; if it's a period drama, ask them to prepare a speech from one. Let them know that they do not have to memorize their prepared speech; unless you so inform them, some will go to the trouble of memorizing something. Tell actors that they will also read from your script and that they should show up a little early to look over the sides.

(Some directors, particularly in the non-union arenas, choose to hold a general call in which hopefuls may show up any time between given hours on one or several audition days. This method saves you prep time at the expense of the talent. Actors have to sit around until you get around to seeing them. You waste their time and humiliate them in one stroke. I don't recommend it.)

### **Audition appointments**

Schedule appointments to leave enough time for actors to read from the material they bring and from your sides. Allow time to usher them in and out. You can see one actor every ten minutes. The more you see, the more choices you have. Therefore, you want to keep chit-chat to a minimum. This may be difficult. Some actors feel that schmoozing during a casting appointment is good strategy. It isn't, and you should politely but firmly discourage it.

On the other hand, I think it important to give each auditionee the full time allotted. You often can tell a bad actor within seconds of his/her first utterance. Nonetheless, tryouts are stressful enough for actors without cutting someone short and thereby adding humiliation to the mix. I don't mind stopping someone who goes over the allotted time or who wants to schmooze or who otherwise acts unprofessionally. But unless they overstep the bounds, my assistants and I maintain a polite, good-humored distance, which minimizes actor stress without encouraging inappropriate familiarity.

### **Restrictions**

Operating under an AFTRA agreement, I allow only union members to audition. My P.A.s check their membership cards at the door. When not working under union auspices, you should impose some sort of restrictions about who you will welcome at your tryouts. That's because anybody can wake up in the morning, decide to be an actor today, and book an appointment. Without a weeding process of some type, you will see 20 psychos, losers, and boobs for every decent performer.

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### What to Listen for at Generals

From the speeches the auditionees bring in, you can get a fairly good idea how well they do when given a chance to prepare. From the sides you provide, you can learn how they deal with fresh material and the play at hand. After years of experience, I have become able to assess, from the varying quality of the prepared reading and the reading of my sides, how much direction the actor will need from me.

In the four or five minutes you give talent during generals, answer these questions for yourself:

- Does the talent read with understanding, technique, personality, and an appreciation of style?
- Does the talent sound convincing, believable, real?
- Does the talent display microphone experience?
- Is the talent's voice easy on the ears? or does the talent possess grating qualities such as descending or monotonous cadences, speech impediments, stridency, mike fright, mannerisms, adenoids?
- Does the talent seem appropriate for one or more of the roles for which you are casting?
- Does the talent behave in a professional and cooperative manner?

It is usual to designate your P.A. to “read against” the auditionees — that is, to read the other role or roles in the sides, to “feed the cues” to the auditionee. I will often read against the actor myself. Doing so tells me how much or how little the actor gives to fellow actors in performance. When an actor gives to you, you can feel it.

### Call-backs

After the generals, assess the relative merits of the auditionees. You can probably eliminate at once the actors who are no good. Of the remainder, you have to determine who seem to be 1) the best and 2) most suitable for the roles you have to fill. After eliminating those who do not seem appropriate for the roles, call back the rest.

Call-backs are looser and longer than generals. You may take an hour or more with each actor. You may even schedule all the people you wish to see for the same date and time. You'll make new, longer sides. You will read actors together and may have actors read scenes together in various combinations. Whatever you need to do to make your choices.

I make call-back sides that allow me to hear two or more actors at once. Say Character A has scenes with Character B. Ideally, you want each actor you're considering for Character A to read with every Character B person. I may be considering an actor for more than one role and will have that person read for each in various combinations with the other talent whom I've called back.

Once or twice while they read from your sides, you will interrupt the actors and ask for an adjustment. “Could you try that again, angrier?” “Try to make her more ingratiating. Start again from where you left off and go on.” *Et cetera*. In this way you can get an idea of how well the talent takes direction.



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### **What to Listen for at Call-backs**

You will further test the qualities you were assessing during the generals. In addition, you want to learn:

- Which actors are most effective playing which characters?
- How well does the actor develop during the course of the scene? Does the actor play all on one level? Understand the character's intent?
- Does the actor make hackneyed choices or fresh, imaginative ones?
- How do the voices balance? Voices must complement and be easily distinguished from each other, otherwise the listener won't be able to tell who's who.
- How well do the actors respond to direction?

### **Review**

Presumably you will have made notes during auditions to review along with the recordings you have made. Final casting decisions, though based on the criteria mentioned above, are totally subjective. Trust your own taste, training, and experience. However, in weighing these criteria, give most weight to three factors: believability, balance and personality. And of those three, a strong, memorable vocal personality consonant with the character's trumps everything else.

Sometimes the decisions aren't yours alone to make. Sometimes the writer, director, and producer all have input. While the director's opinion should carry the most weight, ultimately, the producer has final say. In my own experience, I have most frequently had to make casting decisions alone. Occasions on which I have had consultation with a colleague or shared casting responsibility have always proven good experiences.

I rarely call an actor back more than once. It's not necessary in most circumstances. Besides, at the pittance I pay, I do not wish to impose overmuch on the talent.

### **Follow-up**

After most auditions, only the actors cast are notified. However, I recommend my method as a courtesy to all talent who have taken the time to tryout.

- Notify the actors you have cast by telephone.
- Notify the others by mail, and be sure to thank them for showing up.
- Actors whom you did not cast, but who impressed you favorably, ought to receive a personal note encouraging them to return at your next open call.
- Actors gripe that they never get any feedback after an audition. Except as noted above, do NOT give feedback to actors you haven't cast. In spite of their complaints, they will not appreciate your telling them honestly why you did not hire them. Your honest appraisals, however constructive in tone, will only hurt feelings and give you a bad reputation around the acting community.

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# NINE

## Stereo Blocking

“Blocking” is a theater term meaning the choreography of movement in a stage play. The action is “blocked out” on the stage floor. In a monophonic program, the listener supplies most of the blocking. Distance is depth — on-mike, off-mike; fading up, fading. Everything important is on-mike, everything else balanced for intelligibility behind the on-mike position. Simple. Flexible. Mono invites listeners to make the imaginative leap that places the action anywhere around them.

Stereo is more mundane. It gives the listener less to do. You lay out the action for the listener not only forward and back but side to side. With the action pinpointed in stereo, it always takes place *in front* of the listener. Listeners are removed from it, like the audience in a playhouse.

The upside is enhanced sound quality and discrimination of sound elements, particularly important for large cast productions and complex sound plots. Otherwise, I find stereo a time consuming head-ache. Most listeners tune in with mono receivers or in environments that compromise the stereo signal. Therefore, you have to block, or choreograph, action so that production values hold up in mono. If it weren't for the commercial draw of stereo, I would work exclusively in mono.

## Binaural and Quad

Stereo lays out action before the listener. Binaural and true quadrophonic technologies can place the listener in the center of the action. I believe that both will remain rare in audio drama, though binaural systems may become important in virtual reality. Therefore, I don't want to dwell too long on either.

*True* quad captures and plays back sound on four channels. The listener is in the middle. Theoretically, the action can take place anywhere around the listener. True quad works only for non-broadcast audio.

Broadcast quad is *matrixed*, not true — that is, there are only three channels, two in front of the listener and one in back. The third and fourth speakers on the listener's receiver play back the same signal, doctored to sound like two discrete channels. Matrixed quad renders the two back channels useless except for environmental overtones. Both forms of quad have largely disappeared with the advent of “surround sound” and “home theater” sound systems.

Binaural captures sound on two channels in a way that imitates human ears. Two special mikes rest in the ears of a head-shaped shell, the *kuntskopf* (German: "art head"). The mikes react to sound resonating in the shell like ears reacting to sound resonating through the skull. Listening with earphones, the audience can discern not only left and right, forward and back, but up and down. Over speakers, everything sounds distant, unless you compensate in the mix, which compromises the binaural effect.

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Used with restraint, the ability to place the listener in the center of the action has immense possibilities. However, these are the same possibilities of mono, in which listeners put themselves in the center of the action by force of imagination rather than of technology, a far superior system in my opinion.

### Stereo in Live Performance

The principles outlined here hold true whether you record the performance under controlled studio conditions or before a live audience. Realistic or complex stereo placement and movement, however, becomes more difficult for live performance. This is because you have a stage picture as well as a stereo picture to worry about. You want every on stage to “uncover” to the studio audience, that is, to position themselves so that the “house” can see their facial expressions and actions. One has several options for accomplishing this while giving the home audience satisfactory stereo, though correctly positioned stereo “foley” (mechanical, as opposed to pre-recorded, sound effects) is almost impossible. We cannot go into the subject in detail here, except to advise against attempting realistic and precise stereo placement when performing before a live audience.

### Stage Blocking

The general principles of stereo blocking resembles those for stage blocking. The conventional proscenium playing area is divided into a checkerboard of fifteen equal blocks. The area closest to the audience is said to be downstage; the farthest is upstage. Important action takes place downstage, the most important down left. (Because we read from left to right, down left is considered the strongest playing area. Presumably, down right is the strongest playing area in Israel, where people read Hebrew from right to left.) The next strongest playing area is down center. Strongest area for entrances and exits is up-center. Sets are frequently in forced perspective, because a shallow stage carries sound better than a deep one.

Up left	up left center	up center	up right center	up right
stage left	left center	stage center	right center	right center
down left	down left center	down center	down right center	down right

audience

In blocking, stage directors concern themselves with the stage picture. Even when the action takes place on only a portion of the total stage, the stage picture must *balance* or *dress* the playing area so that the audience can see. *Sight lines* and aesthetic symmetry from the perspective of the "house," or audience area, are very important. Actors and objects "cheat" to the house to keep action *uncovered* to the audience. For instance, as an actor you learn to gesture with your

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

upstage arm, stand partly facing the audience and partly to the person to whom you're talking, when turning always to turn downstage, etc.

All this helps the audience focus on the important action. To divide focus weakens the action. For instance, while one character is saying or doing something important, the other characters are often blocked so that they are still, because their movement could divert attention, or *displace action*. Lighting and other production values can enhance or detract from focus, but the blocking is the principle focus tool.

### Stereo

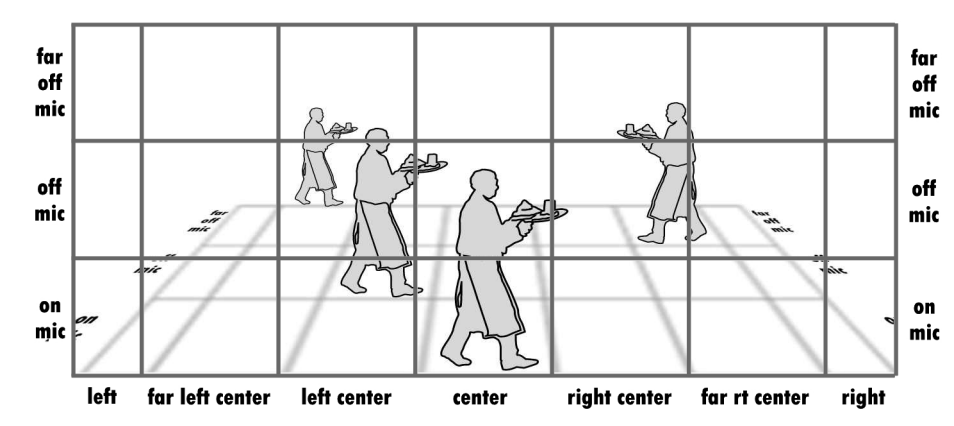
In a similar way, I divide the stereo field into a checkerboard of 15 blocks. However, the blocks are not equal. This is because stereo is an illusion. There are only two real channels of sound played back on two speaker assemblies occupying but two positions of real space. You create the stereo illusion (partly) by the balance of sound levels. When the levels of the two channels are equal, the sound seems to originate from stereo center. When the sound is louder on one side than on the other, it seems to come from stereo right or stereo left. When the sound is recorded only on one side, it seems to come from stereo far left or right.

← most effective playing area →						
bg far left	back ground left	back ground left center	back ground center	back ground right center	back ground right	bg far right
off-mike far left	on-mike left	on-mike left center	off-mike center	off-mike right center	off-mike right	off-mike far right
on-mike far left	on-mike left	on-mike left center	on-mike center	on-mike right center	on-mike right	on-mike far right
listener						

Far left and right are narrower than the other positions and rarely used for anything. This is for two reasons. A variety of transmission or reception conditions may make sounds on only one stereo channel disappear. Far sounds will seem out of balance or non-existent when heard on a mono receiver, or when the listener does not listen to stereo from a position exactly between the two speakers. You should always position important sounds so they pick up on both channels. Only ambient sounds, atmospheres can be, and ought to be, spread out the total width of the stereo field. Doing so gives the illusion of a playing area much larger than the one the principle sounds are using.

## The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

Important action takes place on-mike, the most important on-mike center. This is because the closer to center the louder you can make the sound. (A gun shot far left just below saturation point at +3 db (decibels = units of sound volume) on the one channel is only +3 db overall. A gun shot at stereo center can be +3 db on *both* channels, or effectively +6 db.) The next strongest playing area is on-mike mid-left, 3rd strongest on-mike mid-right. All other positions are relatively weak.



Like the playing area of the stage, the playing area of the stereo field should also be shallow. A subtle sound plot, with full use of the dynamic range will play as badly as use of the entire lateral stereo field, because:

- human ears do not hear amplified sound the way they do acoustic sound; they cannot compensate quickly for loud and soft amplifications — making, for instance, staccato delivery of lines hard to comprehend — and they will adjust to moderate louder amplifications, simultaneously pushing down softer ones;
- when broadcast, the often primitive over-compression on many station transmitters will destroy a subtle mix, squashing all levels into an even *mezzo-forte* stream;
- the listening environment contains its own ambient sounds that can mask your softer levels, and characteristics of the receiver, such as EQ response, can totally wipe them out.

So, depth becomes an illusion, too, like the forced perspective on a stage set.

## The Affective Stereo Field

The *affective*, or apparent, stereo field somewhat compensates for the limitations of the real stereo field. It retreats in perspective. The farther away from the listener you go, the more sounds fit within it. Four characters fit comfortably on-mike, five or more have amply room only slightly back.

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When blocking, cheat towards the on-mike position. The affective field is very shallow. The affective on-mike, off-mike and background positions consume about two-thirds of the real depth.

### Grouping

Group voices, sound and source music in the stereo field according to the following considerations:

**The stereo picture.** For the reasons stated above, action rarely takes place far left or far right. Whenever possible balance the stereo picture. Make all but background sounds orbit around stereo center. Push for stereo symmetry, grouping action evenly on either side of, on and near stereo center.

**Relationships.** Group a sound belonging to a speaking character with the character's voice. In real life, you do not hear a footfall and a voice coming from the same place. In stereophonic audio, you do. Groups of voices and sounds assume more or less natural, common sense positions. Defenders of the fortress are inside, say in various positions left of stereo center; the insurgents are outside, in various positions right of stereo center. Or, if you wish to view the scene from the point of view of the defenders, spread them evenly from left to right down field, and group the insurgents spread left to right up field. Two couples dining in a restaurant would sit evenly spread down field boy-girl-boy-girl, with perhaps the boy and girl closest to center slightly up.

**Perspective.** Place the stereo vanishing point on or near up center. As sounds retreat, the stereo width narrows in an approximation of 3-D perspective. A pinpointed sound will give the illusion that it is narrowing as it gets softer. Sound groupings, will sound as if they are widening as they retreat, unless you narrow their stereo width as you lower their volume. For instance, tourists walk away from a Mariachi band. The mike is supposed to follow them as they go. Their voices and footfalls will remain stationery in stereo. Other sounds will go by them, and the band will not only get softer, but narrower as they leave it.

Perhaps you have a scene that begins with two sets of characters calling to each other over a space, and ends with an extended sotto voce conversation among just one set. The simplest alternative is to place the action entirely from the point of view of the set you end up with. The other characters are off-mike throughout, as in the first example charted below. Perhaps you want to delay taking psychological sides by beginning with an objective perspective and then dollying or zooming in. You'd open the scene with both sets of characters in narrow arrays up-field and equidistant from stereo center. As the conversation between them ends, you would begin a cross fade. During the crossfade, the first set of characters gets softer and pans far to one side. The other set fades up and spreads to balance the downfield area.

### Movement

As when blocking for a stage play, I use "up" and "down" to mean farther and close to the mic. Actors already know these terms. They also know that "cross" means movement and that

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"left" and "right" (or "stage left" and "stage right") refer to the audience's perspective, not theirs. So, if I tell one to start up left and cross down to the stage right mike, talent will know to begin in an off-mike position on his/her right hand side and move to the microphone opposite. You will see these terms used here.

Blocking is not the principle tool for focus — dynamics, EQ and sound mass are. The stereo picture can, however, add or subtract from focus. A great deal of movement or panning weakens focus. On stage, physical movement is often imposed on verbal actions to give audiences something to watch and keep them visually involved. Audio does the opposite. *Characters move only when they must to complete an action.* Arbitrary movement confuses the listener.

Further, *nothing moves in silence!* A character's sound location in a scene cannot suddenly change from stereo left to stereo right. Listeners have to hear the pan, or cross. Avoid small crosses, they will not be heard. When they move, characters should step broadly across the stereo field. Block to facilitate clean, uncluttered, unambiguous pannings and crosses.

Movement and stereo position can enhance illusions of time, place and psychological condition:

**Example #1.** The same character ends one scene and begins the next. Making his/her stereo position in scene 1 different from that of scene 2, helps establish the switch of time and/or location.

**Example #2.** The character narrates a scene that s/he appears in. To help the listener discern narration from participation, place the narrating voice hot on-mike center, back the in-scene voice off slightly and place it off-center.

**Example #3.** Events are growing too big and changing too fast for a character to keep up with. Keep him/her stationary from scene to scene or during the sequence, while events, people and locations keep shifting around the character.

### Ambience

Ambient sounds, or *atmospheres*, hug the background area. Exact depth and width depends upon the fictive environment and physical relationships. For instance, bird calls in the open on a clear day may be lively but will not intrude too far down field — that is, they will not be so loud as to obscure or displace action from on-mike voices and sounds; neither will they be so soft as to form a flat sonic backdrop rather than an environment. They may, however, extend the entire width of the stereo field for the impression of wide open spaces.

On the other hand, bird calls in a pet shop, or the bird house of the zoo will be much farther down field, partly because they are actually closer to the on-mike sounds and voices, and partly because interior surfaces amplify them. For the impression of confined space, you may take the sounds in a little on the far left and right.

Perhaps action takes place indoors where a window is opened up field mid-left. The bird calls that fade up when the window opens will be farther up field than the window sound. It will also be farther up than if the action took place outside. width-wise, the sound will originate mid-left, where the window is, not the entire width of the stereo field.



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## Music

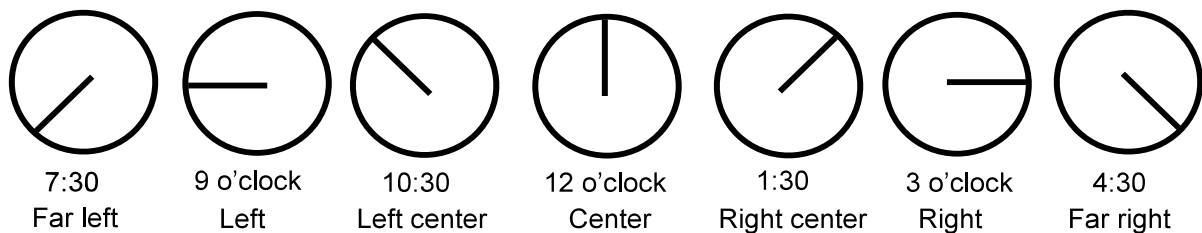
**Background Music.** It is not necessary to indicate the stereo position of background music in your blocking. Assume that you will spread it across the entire width of the stereo field. You will make exact determinations in post.

**Source music.** Pinpointing the stereo position of source music helps differentiate it from background music. When a speaking character plays an instrument, his voice and music should originate from the same position.

## Notation

I use two methods to mark the stereo blocking graphically in my script. Both methods seem clear not only to me, but to the engineers I work with. They use the notations to set-up for the day's session, to ride relative levels and to guide post-production. Therefore, I copy the blocking not only in my script but in those of the engineer and foley walker.

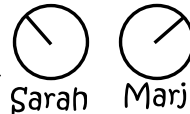
Do not put stereo notation of any kind in the talent's scripts. If you are adding stereo in the mix, the blocking doesn't concern them. Or, if you are blocking them around a stereo mike, they should make their own blocking notes; yours will only confuse them. You will waste more time by explaining your blocking notes than by teaching the blocking orally.



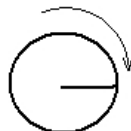
## The Clock Dial

In the first method, particularly useful for simple productions with few sounds and little movement, I simply make notes in the margins of the script, or where ever there's room. I draw the circular top of a pan pot as my basic icon. It looks like the face of a clock with only one dial. Five or five o'clock is stereo far right, nine o'clock is stereo far left, 10:30 is left center, noon is center, etc.

3.	MUSIC	BRIDGE.
4.	SOUND	FADE UP OUTDOOR
5.	SARAH	Well, here we are.
6.	MARJORY	It looks like we

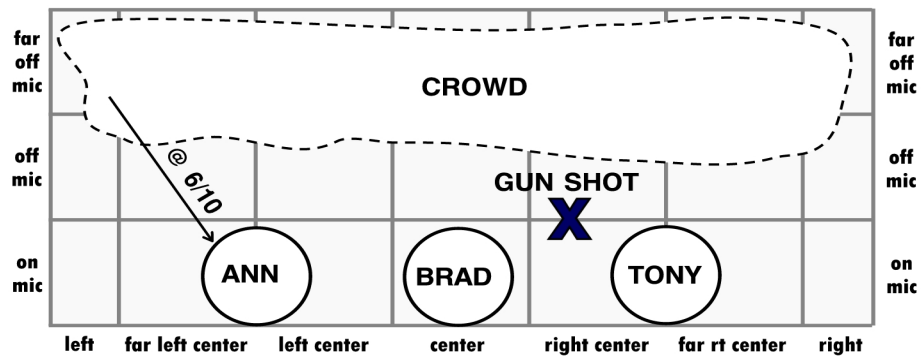


I indicate pans with a curved arrow.



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For more complex productions where depth is as important as width, I paste full charts in the script opposite the pages to which they apply. Upon putting the director's script in a three ring binder, I can see the blocking and the lines at one glance. In an identical fashion, I bind the engineer's script with the blocking. This frees the script pages for numerous other notes that the engineer and I will eventually need to make.



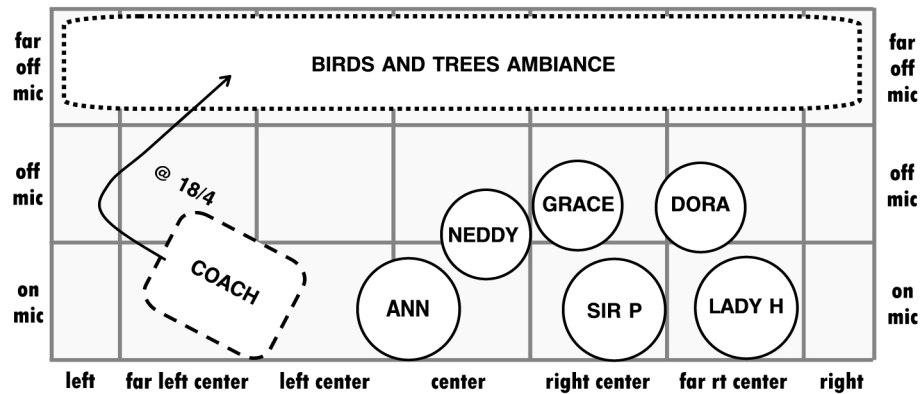
A full stereo grid, such as the one above, defines complex stereo set-ups. You can draw up the basic chart and knock off a bunch of photocopies. Zip one out as needed, draw in the foreground action and paste in the script. Or, as I do, you can use computer graphics, which my collaborators find more satisfactory than my lousy handwriting. The legend near the arrow “@ 6/10” means that the movement shown occurs on page six paragraph 10.



Suppose we were producing a stereo adaptation of a Jane Austin novel, and have to block the scene shown above.

The stereo diagram might look like the this:

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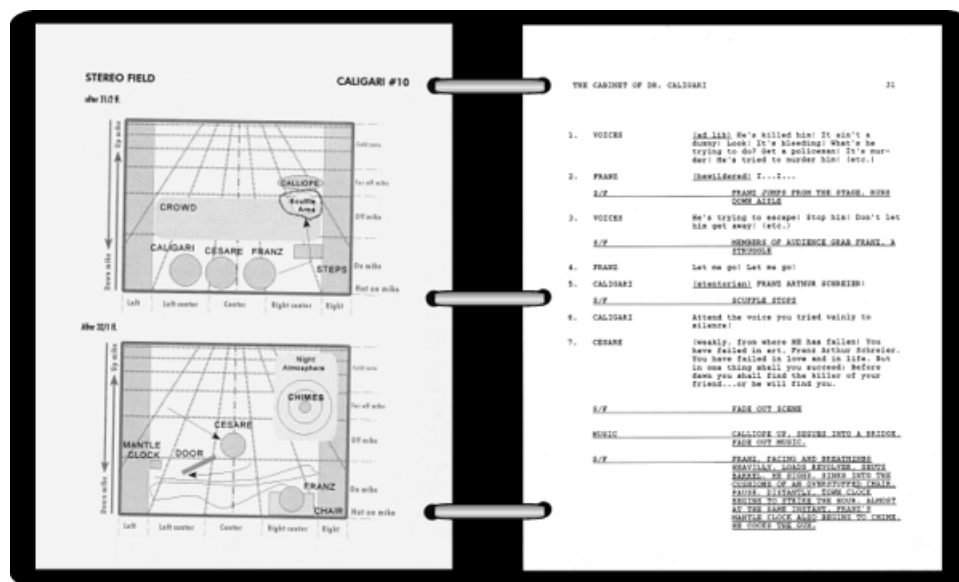
Simpler blocking requires only an abbreviated chart:



The abbreviated chart assumes that all sounds shown occur at the on-mike level. The notation indicates that Stearn enters and leaves left, Ossman enters from right, Fish is stationary in the center. Now, if only two stationary people appear in a scene, I only need:



You can see, from the picture below, how this looks in a three-ring binder, with the stereo notes opposite the page to which they refer.



## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

# X

## Directing Actors

### Basic Principles

#### Background

Why is this chapter so short? After all, isn't directing the most important part of an audio dramatist's job? Surely, there's much more to say on the subject? Yes, but I've said it in the rest of this book. A director should know as much about playwrighting as a playwright, about acting as an actor and about producing as the producer. I don't mean that a director must actually write plays or perform like a pro. However, you do have to study a script and parse its values in order to present it. Often, you have to edit the script for production. And, unless you know what acting is all about, how can you help your talent\* or even know what to expect of them? Therefore, the aspiring audio director should review the other chapters in this tome. Further, you should get some experience behind the mike yourself to get some first-hand knowledge of the kind of effort that goes into the actor's job, particularly how it feels to be on the receiving end of a director.

Cultural literacy and first-hand interaction with a variety of peoples in a variety of environments, pleasant and unpleasant ought to go without saying. Often artists of all types, finding the world at large hostile to them, cloister themselves within a community of fellow artists. Perhaps this explains why writers especially tend to write more authentically when they're young, before they have gained admission to the specialized world of the literati and when the unspecialized, everyday world gleams bright in their consciousness. At any rate, no matter how much you may specialize in one genre or subject matter, eclectic, cosmopolitan and wide ranging experiences can only add depth to your work.

#### Preparation

You must come to the party thoroughly prepared. Know what you want.

#### Casting

I can't emphasize enough the importance of casting. Review that chapter well. Casting is ninety percent of your job. As director, you're only as good as your talent.

#### Directing Traffic

Believe it or not, after casting, you're most important job is "directing traffic" — that is, conducting sessions efficiently, making the best use of your collaborators' time. The more efficiently you work, the less your actors and techies have to wait around for their turn, the better they all behave. Personality conflicts, bruised egos and frustrations develop in idle time. On the other hand, concentrated work stimulates performers, keeps them alert and assures them that you know what you're doing, which encourages their cooperation.

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### **Professionalism**

The more professional you are, the more professional your collaborators will be. Professionalism begets colleguery, that spirit of mutual support and collective identity that contributes so potently to creative exchange and the sense of ensemble. It is your responsibility to engender this spirit by setting an amiable, stimulating, creative and professional example.

### **Seeing**

If you can see the characters and action while listening to your players, the scene is working. If you can't see, then it isn't and you have to bring about adjustments in the playing until you can see with 20/20 vision in your mind's eye.

### **Values**

You can't direct actors to sound the way you heard the play in your head when you read the script silently to yourself. You won't get anywhere that way. Instead, you want to bring out the "spine," or underlying values — sub-text, motivation, style, etc. — that made you hear the script the way you did.

### **Primum Non Nocere**

In taking the Hippocratic Oath, doctors swear to uphold the dictum *primum non nocere* — above all, do no harm. If directors had a similar oath, it would state: "ABOVE ALL, DON'T GET IN THE WAY!" If your cast and crew are doing fine without you're help, keep your mouth shut and leave them alone. If you do not know what to say to aid them, say nothing. For, if you do nothing but let them work, they will somehow come up with something that will play. It may not be exactly right, what the script calls for, but it will get the theatrical job done more than if the players sit idle while you pontificate at length. Avoid running off at the mouth. Valuable rehearsal time should be spent rehearsing. Let your actors get to work and learn to direct them succinctly, if at all.

## **The Table Read**

The desirable first step in any rehearsal period is the "read-through" or "table read," in which the actors perform the script for the first time. They read from beginning to end without any comment from the director, except to clear up some textual ambiguity or type-o. The P.A. reads the sound and music directions. I like to hold this session away from the studio in a cheerful well-lit environment with the cast sitting comfortably around a table.

Thus the actors begin learning how their voices relate to those of the other players, how their parts relate to the property (i.e., the play) as a whole, and, often, how their lines sound when spoken aloud. They begin bonding as an ensemble. If you listen carefully, you learn what your cast brings to the table, the qualities they have to flesh out their characters, the kind of help they need from you to do their best work.

If I have any tips for the talent, I deliver it after the read. Even then, I don't address specific line readings and scenes. Usually, I say something about the general motivation or personalities of the characters, or about the style and atmosphere of the play. Some encouraging words are always appropriate. I like to hold the table read a day or more before we work together

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again. Talent has some time to mull over what they've just experienced and the advice they've heard from me.

Unfortunately, circumstances — tight budget, scheduling or logistical difficulties, or a long episodic property — may sometimes render a read-through impractical. In such a case, you need to schedule more time is needed in the sound studio, and more responsibility falls on the director. Personally, I like the actors to do all the work. All I want is the credit.

### Budgeting Rehearsal Time

After the table read, work should proceed in three overlapping phases, as follows:

**Mechanical Matters.** Teaching the stereo blocking, and/or assigning and spiking mike positions. Get his over with as soon as possible or it will get in the actors' way by dividing their concentration.

**Interpretive Detail.** Concentration on developing characterizations, and extracting values in individual scenes or beats.

**Flow.** Fitting the play within time constraints, if any; fixing the values discovered in the second phase of rehearsal, building ensemble; effective playing of the rising and falling action, pace, the flow of action and consistency of style. If you are recording foley with the voice tracks, which I recommend, your foley walkers should be rehearsing with you during this phase.

This means at least three passes at the script, more if possible. But not every script in every circumstance requires extensive rehearsal. In radio's heyday, most shows went through one run-through before going on-air live. Of course, in those days the plays were written so simply that they could be sight-read, like TV news copy is now. Casts and crews did this kind of work every day. And in series with continuing characters, the principles would come in already steeped in their roles. The more you, your cast and crew have worked together in the past, the easier or simpler the property, the more professional experience everyone brings to the session, the less rehearsal you need.

### Communicating with Talent

#### What to do

What's the best way to communicate with actors? Some directors use various exercises or extra-verbal techniques. I find doing so a waste of time. Every so often, I find a little physicalization helps, that is, moving or positioning the actors to the scene's visual requirements. For instance, when once working with a pair who felt awkward doing a love scene, I made them cuddle in a comfortable nook of the studio, which seemed to work. In another instance, the script called for the characters speaking while they get out of a car, walk into an airport and into an elevator. I staged this by having the players get out of a car in the studio's parking lot, walk into the echoey reception area and into a nearby walk-in closet. This was less for the actors' benefit than for the changes in overtones on the voices from the differing environments. With the addition of airport ambiance track and elevator door sfx in post, those overtones heightened the sense of action and place for listeners.

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Normally, however, I find the best way to communicate with actors is to just tell them what I want. If capable actors understand what you are looking for, chances are they'll find a way to provide it. If actors understand but still can't produce the goods, you made a mistake when you cast them. Unless, of course, they're kids. My technique has always disappointed me when I've had to work with children — or, for that matter, anyone with limited comprehension of English. Otherwise, I have developed a large vocabulary and trained myself to be articulate enough to pull off "the talking method" with most adult players I am privileged to work with.

### **How to Do It**

How you speak is as important as what you say. You can come off like a fool, a tyrant, abusive, a snot or an egotist if you don't watch out. I, for one, wouldn't mind projecting any one of those personalities, if it produced results. But it tends to get in the way. (I need to qualify this remark. When I was starting out on a career, the director I trained with, by far the best in Chicago at the time, had a remarkable knack for building ensemble in his casts. He did this by being so obnoxious that the players would bond in their collective hatred of him. Whether he behaved badly on purpose or not, I can't say. I only know that it worked for him in my home town. Later, after he left, he made himself so odious to the writer of a play he was directing that the writer burned down the theater. The lesson here? You tell me.) I'm not sure why I get along so well with talent when I get along with practically no one else. However, I think it's because:

- 1) I love actors and working with them has always been a treat (actors can sense your feelings towards them and will respond accordingly);
- 2) I am often energized and confident when working with capable people who are doing their best, and such animation is infectious.

Conversely, when I'm not feeling good about how things are going, my affect can make things worse. This I control as best I can and always regret when signs of frustration and impatience leak out. Which brings up the subject of temper. You never should really blow up at actors. You should only fake it as a directorial technique. The only time you can afford to show temper is when a player does something outrageous — a conscious breach of professional behavior that threatens to undermine the production, or when it is clear that the performer is not trying. You have to be prudent when using temper in this way. Negative affect as often as not encourages negative affect in your players. Never, under any circumstances, are dismissiveness or condescension or personal remarks justified.

### **When to Do It**

When do you throw your two cents in? When necessary. Otherwise shut up and let 'em work. Most of the time, I take notes while I listen, usually a word or two to remind me of what I want to say along with the page and line numbers to which the note refers. At a convenient stopping point, I will give my remarks. During recording, I will stop if I hear an egregious flub that will derail the sequence we're working on. If the flub is slight, I'll let it go and take it again in a wild track to be edited in during post. If you keep interrupting the actors will never get a sense of the flow or how elements of the property relate to each other and make for a dynamic whole.



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If you have some luxury of time, you may find it productive early on to interrupt as things come along that need correcting. Once the details are pretty much out of the way, concentrate on the entirety and let the actors work in long chunks before commenting.

**A pitfall to guard against** — A common error of beginning directors is to concentrate so much on little details that by the time it's time to lay tracks down, they've over-rehearsed the first part of the play without ever getting to the rest of it. Thorough preparation and smart scheduling helps prevent this misuse of rehearsal time.

### Editing

Before you can call it a day, you have to listen to the usable takes and choose the final tracks. You may have already selected keepers while recording, or have reviewed the day's takes at the end of individual sessions. My practice is to instruct the editor to use the last take of each scene or recorded sequence, unless otherwise noted. I may cut good lines from otherwise bad takes into good takes with some bad line readings or flubs. Then, if the play was recorded out of sequence, comes the "assembly," in which the good takes are edited together in sequence. After that comes your last chance to effect the actors' performances, by editing the tracks.

Now, you can sit down with your engineer for the editing session, make the changes yourself, or, better, audition a CD or DAT copy of the assembled tracks, marking the changes you desire in a script. It is my practice to mark the script in red, using the following notation:


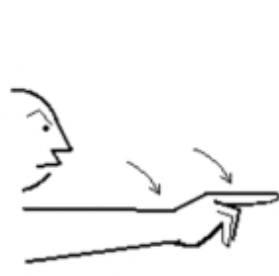


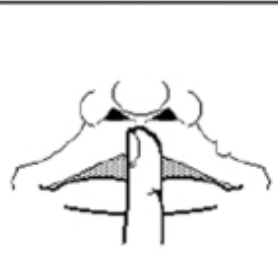
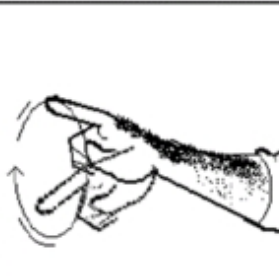

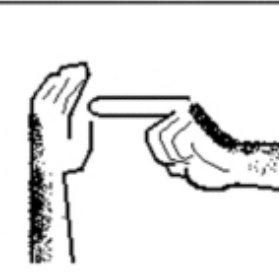


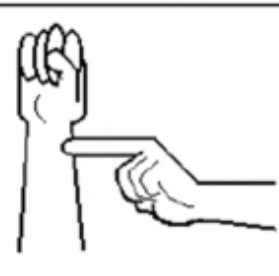





# = add a beat pause	## = add a longer pause	/ = shorten pause	// = totally remove pause
^ = boost the gain	V = lower the gain	— = smooth out the edit or gain	O = remove breath or mouth noise

A squiggle in the left margin opposite the note alerts the engineer that there's an edit in the body of the text. Thus, a script page could look something like this:

MS AMAZING		18
1.	<u>MUSIC</u>	<u>BRIDGE.</u>
2.	CHASE	(narrating) I found J.L. lounging in her bathtub.
3.	<u>SOUND</u>	<u>FADE UP BATHROOM ATMOSPHERE. OCCASIONAL SLOSH OF BATHWATER.</u>
4.	JL	Yeah, you could say I broke her in, showed her the ropes. ✓ Light me.
5.	CHASE	// (in scene) Sure.
6.	<u>SOUND</u>	<u>LIGHTER.</u>
7.	JL	(after a couple of long puffs) Thanks.
8.	CHASE	O Give me a handle on her, JL. / How'd she burn out?
9.	JL	How the hell do I know? I'm not her nurse maid, thank God! (roguishly) Getting an eye full?

# The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist

## Director's Hand Signals

 <p>Get ready</p>	 <p>Go</p>	 <p>Cut</p>	 <p>Louder</p>
 <p>Softer</p>	 <p>Faster</p>	 <p>Slower</p>	 <p>Get closer to the mike</p>
 <p>Back off the mike</p>	 <p>Improve diction</p>	 <p>More energy</p>	 <p>Build</p>
 <p>More expressiveness</p>	 <p>Tighten Cues</p>	 <p>Perfect On the nose</p>	 <p>I lost my @#\$\$%&amp;*! place</p>

### **Working "Live:" Performance before a House Audience**

When a live audience shares space in real time with the performers, you have to be aware you have two audiences to consider, the one in attendance that can see and the remote one that can't. For the latter, the former is part of the show, even when it is silent. Direct your actors to play to the house. This does not mean that they have to project to the last row. After all, the cast is miked and the signal piped into the auditorium (or should be). Quiet moments can still be played quietly. But the actors have to "play up" as they would in a regular stage play — that is, more broadly and, in general, louder than they would perform in the studio. If you've ever directed for the live theater, you already know that a synergy can develop between the house and the players that energizes the talent and deeply stirs the viewers. You want to shoot for that synergy. The remote listener will hear it. On the other hand, if you try to ignore the house and play to the home audience, you will probably satisfy neither.

Direct traffic carefully, making sure that each actor gets to the right position in time for his or her cue, that the stage is balanced, and that crosses to and from mikes are accomplished without your people bumping into each other or displacing audience focus. All players required for the act should come on stage before the act begins and stay, seated quietly upstage when not needed. Even then, they are part of the performance, because the house can see them. Therefore, they should be fairly still and completely silent, attentively watching what's happening at the mikes while following with their scripts. It's a good idea to keep bottled water under each chair, though it is not such a good idea for actors to hold and sip frequently from their bottles while waiting for their cues.

At the mikes, place actors for the best compromise between good on-mike positions and good sight-lines. They should always uncover to the house, holding scripts in their downstage hands. The more mikes that are "hot" at one time, the more risk of feedback and unwanted noise. Since you may need two or more mikes for the foley, and more for the musicians, avoid using more than three or four mikes for the talent. They can share mikes, if necessary, though you should avoid placing more than three actors on the same mike at the same time. Actors should stand at the mikes; standing is best for sight-lines and energy. Give an actor who must sit a high stool rather than a regular chair.

### **Hand Signals**

In the studio, I use hand signals sparingly if at all. They can distract and irritate more than they can help. The beauty of them is in the ability they give you to direct without interrupting the flow of a scene, which you particularly want to avoid when the talent is on a roll. But if your gesticulations are just going to divide your actors' focus, you defeat that purpose. So, you have to feel out the cast members, some of whom may take to it and some not.

When I do use hand signals in the studio, I ensconce myself on the same side of the glass as the talent. They can't see me well if I remain in the booth. I wear "cans" (earphones) so that I can hear how they sound through the equipment. That's the sound that the audience will hear and that you are directing for. I make sure I'm wearing soft-soled shoes and clothing or jewelry that will not produce rustling noises. I stand so that when I'm signaling I do not force talent to adjust mike position in order to see me.

## **The Well-tempered Audio Dramatist**

When directing in an auditorium before a house audience, hand signals take on an additional role. They provide visual interest for the viewers. So that I can talk freely with the engineer, I stay in the booth and guide actors through the intermediary of a floor director. The floor director, position between the talent and the audience on the auditorium floor for the sake of sight-lines, hears me through cans and passes on my comments via hand signals. I often engage a performer to direct from the floor, as a little judicious showmanship applied to the job doesn't hurt. The floor director cues the audience to encourage applause and hardy laughter in appropriate spots.

The signals shown above are all that I ever need. I have the chart duplicated and distributed to the talent at the first rehearsal, during which I will demonstrate their use. I will then use them during subsequent rehearsals so that the cast can get use to them.

### **Tricks of the Trade**

- Whenever you can, rehearse the actors at the mikes. While the actors are getting needed practice positioning themselves properly and maneuvering script pages silently, the recordist can set levels, practice riding gain, check on and resolve potential problems such as too much room tone, over- and under-modulation, mike popping, etc.
- Record rehearsals. You may be able to pull lines from them in case you find flubs in otherwise usable takes during post. Besides, who knows? You could get lucky, even on the first try.
- Under-rehearse to preserve spontaneity in your players. If there are minor flaws, you can clean them up with wild tracks and judicious editing. Trying for perfection can result in over-rehearsing; by the time the actors are letter-perfect, they're stale, lifeless. You then have to work them some more to get the spark back.
- Avoid giving line readings — that is, speaking a line yourself and asking talent to imitate you. Most actors consider it insulting. However, if a player asks for it, feel free.
- Have actors hold scripts rather than use music stands. Music stands just get in the way.
- Encourage players to keep still at the mike. Some will shift on their feet or try to make eye contact with the other players, thus compromising their mike positions. Some will gesture, thinking that doing so somehow helps them perform vocally. All it actually does is diffuse energy that is better focused up and out the mouth. Other actors fidget nervously without realizing it, even noisily rattling the change in their pockets or playing with the jewelry they're wearing.
- The more you genuinely value your actors, the more they'll notice it without your trying to show them, and the easier it will be for you to get good performances out of them. I don't know why this works, but it does.
- Pauses are extremely potent in audio. Use them sparingly.

# ELEVEN

## Foley: Live Sound Effects

### Live Performance

In performances before studio audiences, foley adds considerable visual interest. A foley walker for such a set-up needs stage presence, showmanship and a good ear. S/he also must know when to give and take stage, for a real hambone working the sound effects can easily upstage the actors. Perhaps that explains why radio sfx personnel in the old days belonged to AFRA, an actors' union.

Typically, the foley gear is arrayed on and around a table off to one side of the stage or performance area. One mike covers the table and another the floor. The table mike never sits on the table but is shock mounted on a floor stand high enough to capture vocal effects, such as dog barks, hoot owls, raspberries, gurgles, bubbles and assorted moans and groans. One or two foley walkers, more if needed, do all the live sound effects.

Some sounds that are typically foleyed before a studio audience are best prerecorded. Firearms, for instance, are dangerous and all too frequently — that is to say, more times than not — fail to go off on cue. Recently, doing a Western at the L.A. Theater Center, our foley guy had to shoot off a few six guns. He brought two blank pistols and a cap gun just in case. None of them worked during the performance. He should have brought a stout flat board as well. A standard back up for gun sounds, the board gives a so-so gun-like crack when smacked smartly against a hard surface. Alternately, you can do more-or-less convincing gunshots vocally, by making a guttural sound (as in Bach, Khanukah) close to the mike and holding it — "Khkh! Khkh! You're dead!" With practice, quickly blowing — poof, poof! — right into the mike's diaphragm makes a nice cannon. (Doing this into your girlfriend's diaphragm also is known to produce explosive effects.)

Conversely, some effects typically prerecorded are best foleyed. Ambiances, for instance. At any rate, you shouldn't use a particularly realistic ambiance. Your foley and voices necessarily sound as if recorded or transmitted from a theater, which they are. A realistic background of a factory, say, or sylvan glen or city traffic will clash with such a foreground. Instead, an often purposely artificial-sounding ambiance is introduced as a scene starts so as to set the scene, then unobtrusively snuck out when it's job is done.

### In the Sound Studio

Even under controlled conditions without an audience in the studio, I find foley important because:

- you can never find every single thing you need in a sound effects library,
- foley while recording the voice tracks is faster, easier, and cheaper than adding the sounds in post, and
- talent plays off the sounds, thus performing more responsively to the fictive environment than they would if they didn't hear the foley.

When recording in stereo, especially when using a stereo mike or area mics, the foley walker(s) pad around the room so that their sounds can be heard in the proper stereo perspective. Talent does their own footfalls. "Wear hard-soled shoes at the session, boys and girls!" When recording

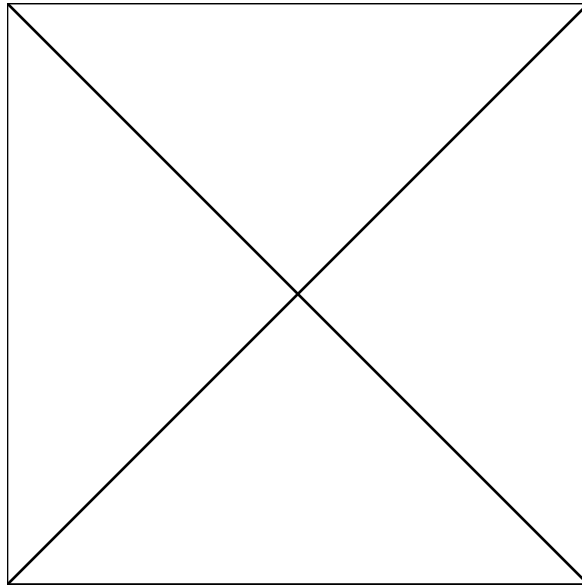
## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

in mono or when talent is being recorded onto separate tracks, you can set aside part of the room as a foley area, which makes life easier for your walkers.

The question arises: what to foley, what to lift from a recording. Well, theater people distinguish between "practical" props and set dressing. A practical prop is any object on stage, aside from furniture, that actually gets used. In such a way we can identify "practical" sfx as any discrete (i.e, non-ambient, relatively short) sound effect that must be heard to advance the action. Any such "practical" sound that you can possibly foley, you foley.

In principle, at any rate. In practice, any number of factors can influence how and what you foley — your access to gizmos and recordings, the skill of your walker, the size and configuration of the recording environment, etc. As with every other rule in this book, this principle must be tempered with common sense and imagination, especially as few if any of us in America today work under ideal or even professionally acceptable circumstances for audio drama.

Samplers provide the most efficient foleying capacity. After loading effects into a sampler, you can play them out on a keyboard as needed. So many electronic adjustments to and combinations of the sampled sounds are possible that you can virtually quadruple your sound library on the fly. Typically, you load in sounds that you anticipate using frequently — footfalls, doors, telephones, etc. Exotic effects that may crop up only once may not be worth the effort of loading in. A sampler obviates the need to build or acquire a foley kit for studio use.



## The Basic Foley Kit

Please note that, of the items discussed below, some are useful on stage before a studio audience (*e.g.*, wind machines, thunder sheets), but unnecessary or undesirable otherwise. Some must be handmade, but you can find many others in shops that purvey percussion instruments (anvils, horses' hooves, slap sticks, tubular bells, and wind machines are sometimes called for in symphonic and show music), party favors, hardware, toys, and groceries. A junkyard is also an excellent place to shop for raw materials such as doors, thunder sheets, and door frames. Following are often needed effects and common gizmos for creating them.

**Wind machine.** A sheet of canvas over a revolving drum of wooden slats. The fierceness of the wind is determined by the speed of the revolution. The drum is turned unevenly, for wind never blows at a constant speed. Adjusting the tension of the canvas at it's free end can also alter the sound.

**Rain box.** 2 Wooden boxes 6' x 6" x 6", the floors of which are studded with nails hammered up from outside. Dried peas inside. Boxes are see-sawed to make the sound of rain.

**Thunder sheet.** Suspend a sheet of galvanized iron from a plank or pipe. Affix a handle. Rattling the iron yields affective thunder. The larger the metal, the more substantial the thunder.

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**Free-standing Door.** Solidly built wooden door frame on casters with one or more doors mounted in it, often with several kinds of knobs, locks and latches. The knob turning is important for opening sounds. The catching of the latch is important for shutting sounds. Sometimes two different types of doors are built into one frame, such as a house door on one side and a screen or jail door opening from the other. Free-standing windows and car doors are also used.

**Gravel boxes.** Shallow boxes large enough to stand in filled with gravel, dirt, crumpled paper (for leaves), artificial grass, etc. Stomp in them to make various footfall sounds. Foley walkers also keep on hand various flooring fragments — marble, woods of various thicknesses, a slab of concrete — as well as a portable stair unit and several kinds of men's and women's shoes. Muddy, slushy footfalls are often done with damp sponges in the gravel boxes instead of the foley walker's shod feet. In the '40s footfalls were conventionalized. Men's had a heel toe double sound. Women's had only one sound as if all women wore high heels that forced them to place heel and toe down together.

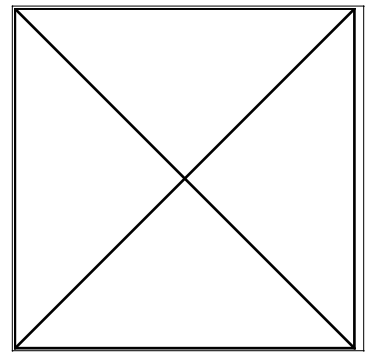
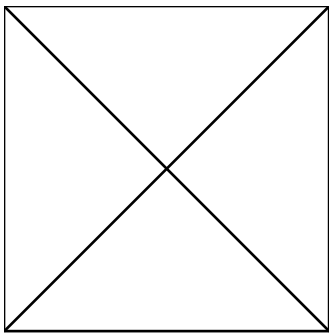
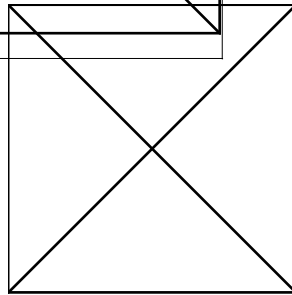
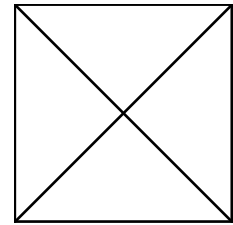
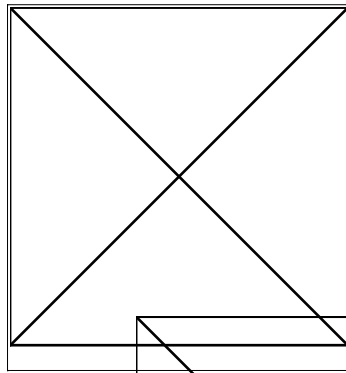
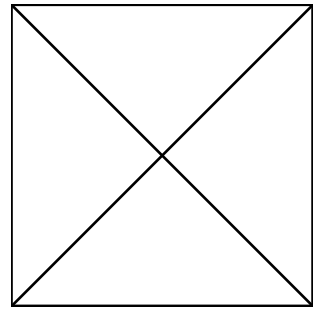
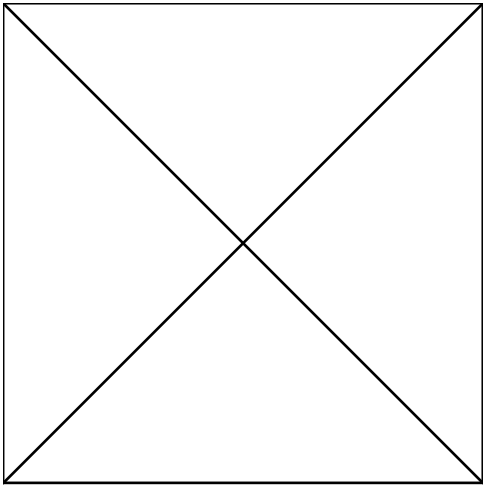
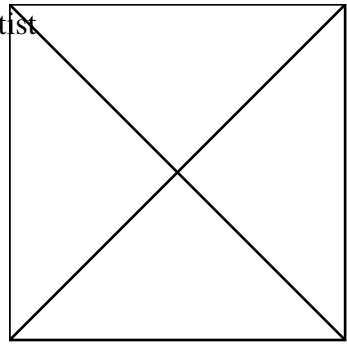
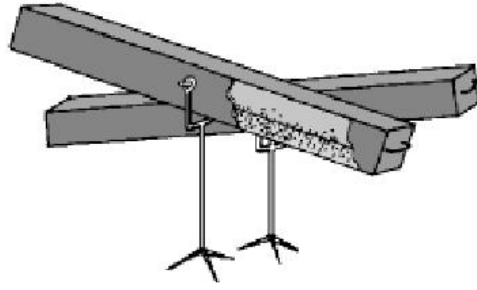
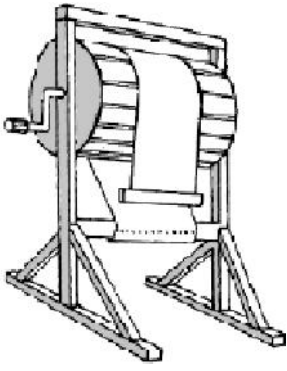
**Bell & buzzer Unit.** A box or plywood plank upon which are afixed various bells, buzzers, buttons and switches. Can be rigged to work on batteries or to plug in to a normal outlet.

**Telephones.** It is best to have two telephones on hand — a modern push button phone and an old-fashioned non-plastic dial phone. To make an identifiable sound of the receiver, give a little jiggle when picking up and setting down.

**Marching Men.** Identical wooden pegs fastened to a frame at the top by flexible or elastic bands, so that pegs dangle down. When held by the frame and plopped rhythmically on a hard surface, behold! an army.

**Squeaker.** For doors and other squeaks. A dowel or wooden cylinder is battened down so that it is perpendicular to the floor and unable to move. A removable, hand-held wooden vice snugly grips the dowel near the top end. Rotating the vice produces the squeak. Rubbing a thumb against an old-fashioned blown-up kid's balloon can make a good squeak after a lot of practice.

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## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

**Snow Feet.** A standard box of corn starch is squeezed to make the sound of walking on snow. All seams and edges must be securely duct-taped shut to prevent the powder from leaking.

**Horse's hooves.** Yes, Virginia, the scooped out shells of a coconut make excellent horses' hooves. So does drumming fingers on a vinyl-covered binder. Golden Age radio often employed the convention of the 3-legged horse. A 4-legged gallop was too difficult for most sound men, but a duh-duh-dum duh-duh-dum duh-duh-dum was easy. So, most radio horses are amputees.

**Manual phone filter.** A paper or Styrofoam cup held to the side of the mouth makes a satisfactory phone filter. A metal trash can held up in much the same way can add cave-like overtones to the voice.

**Head trauma assembly.** For head trauma, use a melon. Whack it hard with a baseball bat or mallet when you need to bash in somebody's skull. In live performance, a watermelon is more visually impressive than any other kind. Also messier.

**Fire.** Crinkling cellophane makes convincing fire sounds. But large fires not only crackle but hum or roar as well, so for big blazes cellophane must be augmented somehow.

**Wet noises.** For splashes, fill a slop bucket a third to half full of water. Quickly jerking a plumber's friend out of the pail makes a better sound than plunging in. Some sophisticated film foley stages and European radio studios have large vats or pools sunk into the floor for water effects. Most of us have no access to such facilities. When you need more than a simple splash or two, an old, large porcelain bathtub, picked up from a junkyard, will suffice for all sorts of water effects.

**Applause.** No special gizmo does applause. Generally, the talent does it when called for in the script. You don't just clap hands. You use both hands to slap your thighs. Doing so gives the impression of a larger crowd than you actually have.

**Bubble Machine.** Simply a soda straw and container of liquid — water for smaller bubbling and something more viscous for large bubbles.

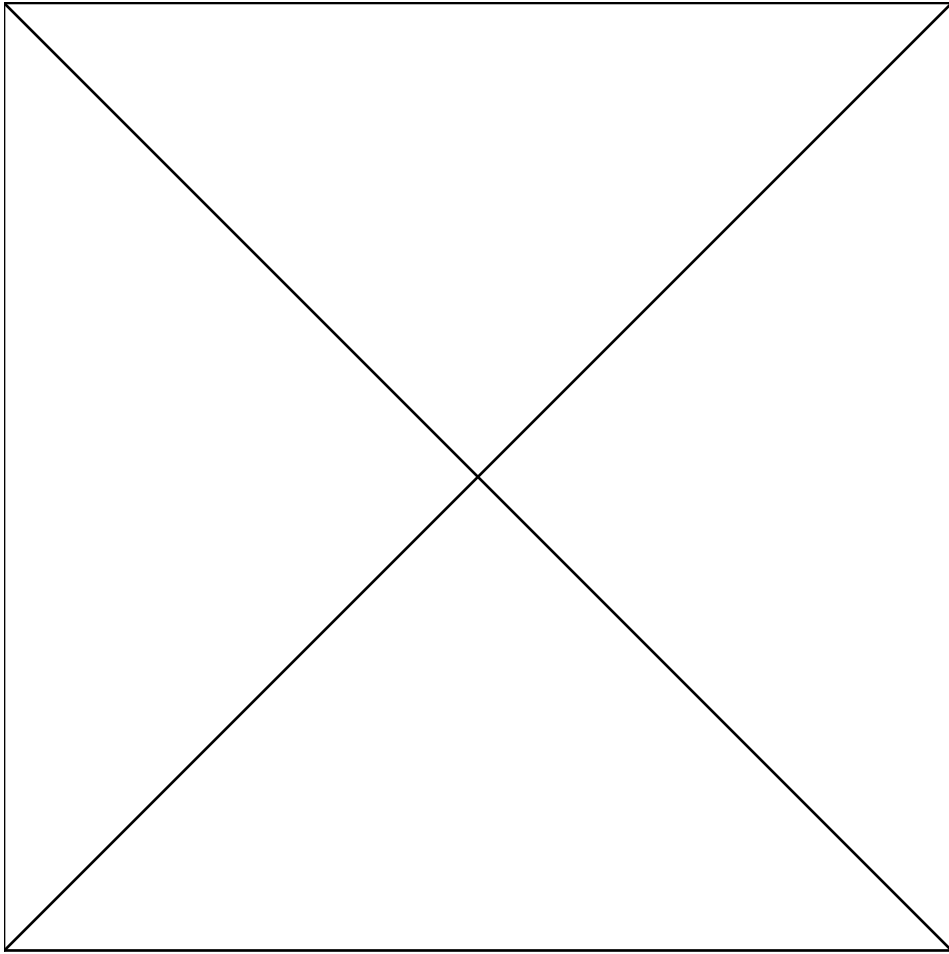
**Guns.** Starter pistols look great for a studio audience, but are notoriously unreliable, even when the foley walker keeps a back-up pistol handy. A better back-up is a piece of plywood a little smaller than a baseball bat. Slapping it smartly against another piece of solid wood yields an acceptable bang. However, no live effect is all that convincing to the ear, so, when NOT performing before a live audience, a pre-recorded effect is best.

**Crash box.** A large, closed cardboard box filled with broken glass and shards of various hard materials can be shaken or banged around for crash effects.

**Drawers and windows.** Sliding a ½" plywood board against a 2" x 4" substitutes for drawers and windows. Some foley walkers prefer rigging a free-standing window, from which drapery can be hung for sliding, and handmade drawer units.

**Miscellaneous gizmos.** In live performance especially, I have from time to time found use for the gadgets shown below.

# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist



# TWELVE

## Production

### Engineering

#### Your Engineer

It was an engineer, Stewart Sloke, who taught me the rudiments of studio craft. Today he's Senior Vice President and Production Director of World Wide Wadio [sic], a state-of-the-art Hollywood production company. At the time, he worked full time for the great Dick Orkin, creator of *Chickenman* and of thousands of award-winning comic radio spots. Stu had imagination, a musician's timing, a terrific ear, and years of experience with commercial spoken word recording. For my part, I was steeped in stagecraft, dramatic literature and the nearly extinct American radio theater. We taught each other.

I consider myself lucky to have begun my career with Stu in Dick Orkin's modest studio. I have since come to realize that it is easier to teach a theater person audio than to teach an engineer theater. Without exception, the techies I've worked with in the United States did not know what drama is all about. The overwhelming majority had no talent for it, nor any great gifts as engineers — including some now engaged more or less regularly with various regional audio dramatists dotted around the country. By far the worst were the NABET members who worked in commercial broadcasting. After that came the drug-addled youths trying to break into the music business via the mixing board. The biggest problems — substance abuse, communication, irresponsibility and poor endurance. Only outside the U.S. have I found technical collaborators who thoroughly know how to do audio drama, get satisfaction from it, and can meet its demands.

The owners of domestic studios I'd investigate would try to sell me on the bells and whistles installed in their recording rooms. But I soon discovered that personnel not gadgetry that makes the difference. Good engineers can produce great tracks out of old vacuum tube boards and mono Ampexes. So, to you, I say that your engineer is your closest collaborator, your co-producer with aesthetic judgment as well as technical expertise to contribute. Your engineer can make or break your production no matter what the quality of your property, your director and your cast.

It's incumbent on you to make the most of the relationship between you and your engineers. After all, audio theater is probably only a small fraction of their work, in most cases not enough to justify their learning your modes of reference. Learn the studio terminology familiar to them; speak to them in their own language. Ground yourself in studio operations, the latest gizmos, tricks of the trade, latest technological innovations. Get some hands-on experience with the equipment. You need to know enough studio craft to oversee the work. I have often heard "that can't be done" when the opining techie just didn't want to make the effort, or didn't know how.

If you're your own engineer, more power to you! I learned long ago how to operate the equipment and have often leant an extra pair of hands to the editing and gain-riding. Still, I have always felt more confident supervising the engineering than in doing it myself. And, I suspect that as a general rule, producers do a better job when they delegate and supervise rather than try to do everything themselves.

#### Fewer Steps vs. Greater Control

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

The more you parse out the studio work, the greater the control you can exert. I mean laying down production elements — voices, foley sound, pre-recorded sfx, original music, stock music — on separate tracks in separate sessions, then editing and mixing them together in a number of further passes. Such parsing lets you begin production with less advance planning than the alternative. However, it consumes huge amounts of time and money. Every step you delay until you have finished recording the voices, takes much more time than if you had done it during the voice sessions. Further, talent can react to sounds they hear while recording better than sounds they have to pretend hearing.

Completely or partially multiplying production steps may be necessitated by the following conditions:

the play requires a complex mix of precisely timed elements and/or stereo effects;

the recording space is small or insufficiently baffled;

you or your collaborators are inexperienced;

you do not have enough time for pre-production;

the play calls for a large cast or many voices on mike at once.

Combining steps requires greater preparation, more concentration and more time with your actors. What you lose in ultimate control you gain in a superior blend of sonic elements into an organic whole. You need to expend more care (especially in advance), but less time and money. No matter which way you go, you still have to size up your requirements and resources at the outside and decide which way to go before production begins.

## Analogue vs Digital

Digital technology has lowered the cost, streamlined production and improved the quality of sound recordings. Yet, many fussy producers and techies prefer analogue media when tracking music. Personally, I hear a qualitative difference between analogue and digital music tracks, even though Consumers Union and other investigators claim there is none. Suffice it to say, that the difference, real or imagined, is too subtle to matter much in audio theater. I prefer the digital realm for its speed, versatility and quiet. If I'm using stock music or canned sound effects, I will use CDs. Avoid relying on DATs, because they are somewhat unreliable. My current engineer saves raw tracks to his hard drive, using DATs only for back-up. We save final mixes on compact disks, which are fairly durable. I use these as masters for all other copies. Although you can fit far more sound information in the MP3 format, I am wary of it for preserving programs, because it degrades the sound somewhat.

Why anyone would willingly produce audio plays in the analogue realm is beyond me. I've noticed that some people love editing recording tape as a form of occupational therapy, but other than that, digital technology is far more reliable and easier on the producer's nerves. If you absolutely must work with recording tape, you have to make sure of some factors that techies do not always handle properly:

- tape recorders and certain outboard gizmos must be recalibrated daily; heads checked for alignment monthly and de-magnetized carefully [careless use of a demagnetizer can produce the opposite effect to the one desired] once a week;
- magnetic tape with the correct frequency response for spoken word and right thickness (usually 1½ millimeters) for avoidance of print-through; all voice tracks should be recorded on the same brand and style of tape;
- for best sound quality, record at a speed of no less than 15 inches per second;

### The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

- masters of final mixes must be stored in climate controlled surroundings and periodically backed up, because tape disintegrates over time;
- a copy made from the master will suffer some quality loss; a copy made from that copy will degenerate even more, and so on; therefore, multi-tracking is preferable to taking tracks down another generation in order to mix in sound or music;
- your AGC cannot be set to bring up the softest desired sounds too high, because you cannot raise them without bringing up concomitant tape hiss; because of audible hiss, too much compression can produce an audible pumping; even a noise gate cannot shut down hash occurring under dialogue;
- never track voices on tape that has been bulk erased for re-use;
- tapes should be stored tails out after play; slow winding adds a cushion of air between layers of tape on the reel or core, which prevents stretching and print-through.

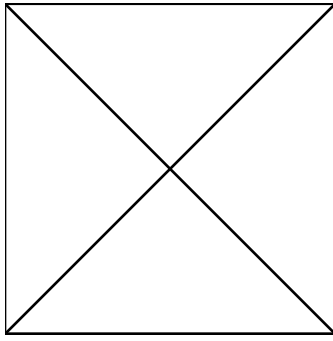
Needless to say, none of these precautions apply to digital media.

## The Sound

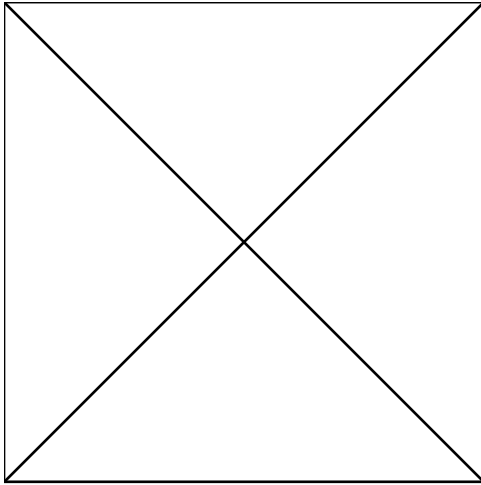
### Dynamics

Important dialogue should take place in the foreground — that is, evenly balanced in strong on-mike positions, as if everyone speaking were lined up side-by-side an equal distance from the listener. Levels for sound and music are set relative to voice levels. Voice levels should always be strong and smooth. Staccato delivery or readings varying greatly and rapidly in volume are hard for the listener to follow. They also interrupt the rhythm of scenes, thus muting tension and blunting the sense that the action is building toward a conclusion. No sound, voice or music of any importance should be set too far in the background. Distance is expressed less by reducing volume than by altering sound quality in some way: adding room tone or reverb, adjusting EQ, etc. No noise should be so loud as to blast the listener.

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## Automatic Gain Control (AGC)



There are several kinds of AGC that boost levels that are too quiet and reduce levels that are too loud. The degree to which they automatically raise or lower volume is adjustable, as well as the speed with which they kick in and out. Some add stridency to the tracks when cranked way up. Avoid them. All cause some deterioration in sound quality, though, in my opinion, the loss is worth it. For, AGC is indispensable for audio drama, not just for preventing distortion, but for smoothing levels. Use AGC only on voice tracks. Set them for immediate attack (the speed in which the AGC kicks in) and immediate release (the speed in which volume returns to normal). When working in stereo, make sure that the AGC on both channels is set for identical responses. The compressors or limiters would be tied together so that a volume change triggered on one channel bring an identical change on the other. Otherwise the voices will wander in stereo.

## Equalization

Adjusting the balance of low and high frequencies can produce a number of important effects. While you don't usually need an expensive eight-octave graphic equalizer like the one shown (although it can't hurt), you ought to have a decent one available. That means no less than four basic controls — for lowest frequencies, low mid-range, high mid-range and highest frequencies.

## Sound Quality

Pristine sound quality is not always important or desirable in audio drama. A little hash or room tone can add a little flavor. Listeners needn't hear the very highest or deepest tones. What you want is reasonably quiet tracks that sound acceptable in mono on a cheap car radio and a bit better than acceptable on the best studio speakers.

## Ambiance

Ambiance tracks contribute a sense of place. This is obvious with such backgrounds as train stations, traffic, twittering birds, car interiors and their like, but with tracks that merely reproduce the relatively quiet circulation of air in the environment. Such "room tone" naturally

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

leaks into the mikes as you record. That is why, you ought to lay down a "presence track" for every scene. After the actors have finished a scene and before they leave the recording space, record the sound of the room as they remain silently in it. The presence in a room can change with the number of people in it. If you have to add a pause in the edit, you cover it with the presence track. Otherwise, all room tone will drop out and the edit will become apparent and distracting.

## Realism

Realism is an effect, not an exact reproduction of the natural world. Objects of the natural world do not necessarily sound like themselves when heard but not scene. A sexy woman may not sound as sexy as a homely woman with a sexy voice. Less is more in audio theater. Too many sounds or too much movement all at once muddies focus. Depth is an illusion you may wish to create. Real depth could make a scene wishy-washy that would sound dynamic if everybody were in strong on-mike positions. As much by what you leave out as what you put in, you must create, not a sonic photograph of reality, but a fictive universe consistent with itself and seductive enough to make the listener to make a "willing suspension of disbelief," a Coleridge famously put it. To accomplish your task with memorable forcefulness, give your listener only as much to hear as is necessary to convey the desired effect.

## Music

**Underscoring.** Musical underscoring — mood or background music that the audience but not the characters are supposed to hear — can enhance mood and the impression of time and place. In my practice, I use this tool sparingly. I am inclined to let the musical bridges do those jobs. In the scene, I direct the actors to provide the mood and ambiance tracks for a sense of location. However, I find underscoring more useful for disguising production flaws, such as noisy tracks, bad edits, weak performances. Of course, it's better to shoot for quiet tracks, good edits and effective performances. But there are times when you have to cut your losses and make the best out of what you have. Hence, the often heard phrase: "We'll save it in the mix." The music should have some reverb on it to "sweeten" it a bit. If there's not enough naturally occurring reverb in the music room, you'll have to add some in the mix.

**Source Music.** This is music that the characters can hear, present in the environment of the scene, as when your characters are watching a parade or dancing in a night club. The character of source music — instrumentation, EQ, presence, etc. — should contrast with the underscoring, so as to avoid confusion and to provide a more authentic impression. You don't necessarily want to sweeten source music with reverb. It has to be consistent with the other sounds in the fictive environment.

**Bridges.** The most frequent method of transitioning from scene to scene is to bridge them with brief strains of music. Bridges have to be long enough (around five seconds) to register with the listener. Longer bridges can help establish that considerable time has elapsed between scenes. Short ones can contribute to mounting tension. Tempo and character should compliment those of the scenes they're bridging. They can fade in and out under the concluding and beginning lines or start and stop in the clear, depending on the effect you want them to produce. A sting at the beginning sets off the curtain line of the scene preceding it. Ending the bridge on a suspended chord, rather than a dominant one, helps drive the play forward.

**Sound Effects and Music Libraries.** For mood, source and bridge music, you can acquire CDs or download MP3 files from various music libraries. Most of these libraries carry a variety of pieces in a choice of styles played by differing combinations of instruments. A disk can

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have several tracks of the same melody: several beds of differing moods, and several bridges of varying lengths. Some downloadable music allows you to pick and choose the instrumentation. Not only are these libraries of disparate quality, the material in each of their catalogues are not equally good. Sometimes, you don't want the best rack. More than once I have chosen a pretty lousy piece of music for comic effect. Some of these libraries offer their wares for free. Most charge a "needle drop" fee — that is, every time a piece is heard in the play, you pay.

Typically, sound effects libraries ask you to buy the desired recording. Once you've made the purchase, every use is free. Commercial production studios often have a supply of recorded sfx on hand. Some will charge you for them, the better ones will not. (They may also have access to stock music, adding a surcharge to the publisher's needle-drop fee.) In my practice, I find the largest and most useful sfx libraries come from Sound Ideas and the BBC, which is sold by Sound Ideas.

## Listening

At times, your instruments will tell you that your levels, stereo placement and EQ are at one setting and your ears will contradict them. You may hear things that the meters and gauges don't register. Which do you believe, the meters or your ears? Your ears are always right. Trust them. The meter readings don't reflect the response of the human auditory apparatus, only what is transmitted to receptors before being turned into sound waves.

You need to listen to your tracks through three sets of speakers. Normal studio speakers are supposed to give you the best sound. But they only manifest what listeners will hear at home on a good quality sound system with the volume hot enough to bother the neighbors. They distort the impression of levels, making voices in particular sound more complimentary than they actually are. Use them to make sure every sound you want is present and unwanted sounds are absent.

Much of your audience will be listening in their cars, or on various mediocre portable devices. So you should double check your mixes on a set of small inferior speakers. Stereo mixes should be double checked in mono to make sure levels are still satisfactory and to guard against phase cancellation. When coordinating the stereo positions of two or more related signals — as when a gun shot must come from the hand of the shooter — move them together and check them while wearing cans. Earphones provide the most accuracy for stereo placement.

You must also appreciate the the special acoustical nature of the booth. Its sound-proofing drastically reduces (or should drastically reduce) those noises competing with the signal in most other listening environments. Therefore, when working on a complex sound plot, you may want to bring your mixes home; listen to them in the car, pop them in your home stereo, load them in your iPod before going on your daily jog. If a program that sounds terrific in the studio sounds satisfactory in real-life listening environments, you're home free.

## Auditorium Production

Working on-stage in front of a house audience is simpler and easier than studio-based production. Don't try to disguise the staginess; use it as a production element. Playing to a house audience tends to enliven the actors, and audience reaction adds to the enjoyment of the remote listener. So, make sure the audience is adequately miked, especially when the property is comic. If a little "slap" or room tone winds up on the tracks, all the better.



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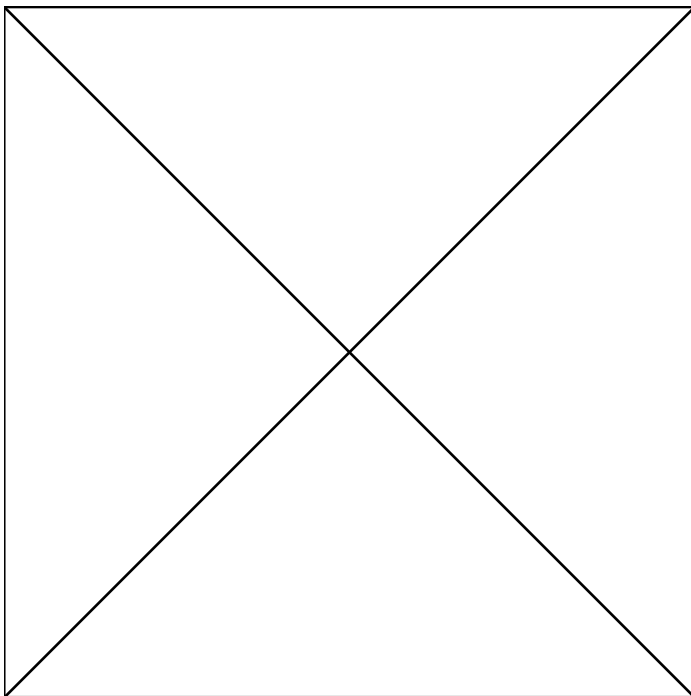
Rather than trying for realism, use sound effects and music in an emblematic fashion — that is, the noises should clearly represent what they're supposed to, but be executed with sufficient artificiality to be in sync with the artificial nature of auditorium production. For instance, rather than using a recording of, say, outdoor ambiance, your foley walkers should use bird whistles and calls. I'm reminded of Alfred Jarry's surrealist comedy *Ubu Roi*. In the original 1896 staging, instead of filling the stage with spear carriers, one actor stands upstage with a sign on his chest stating "Polish Army." That's emblemism in extremis.

To pull auditorium production off, you need to choose a property that works well in this format. Avoid plays that require intimate performance or subtle inflections. You also need an appropriate performance space. One that is too big for the size of the anticipated audience will seem empty to that audience and dilute their pleasure. If the space is too live, intelligibility will suffer. If the stage is too small, you risk feedback and too much leakage from one mike to the next.

You have to adjust stage lights so that the overheads illuminate the scripts adequately while the frontals give the house a good view of the stage without blinding the players. Using the overheads alone, though best for lighting scripts, casts the talent's eyes in shadow, thus hiding from the house their most expressive feature.

I have never, nor would I ever, try to produce an auditorium show in stereo. There are no commercial or artistic reasons for encountering all the production problems stereo carries with it.

It's important, I think, to amplify the stage for the house. The viewers should hear the play much like the home audience does, with voices, sound and music blended. Your techies have to carefully set-up speakers to avoid feedback. This is tricky. The smaller the auditorium, the



trickier it gets, particularly for a comedy, because it's a good idea to mike the audience to get good laugh tracks.

### Auditorium Set-up for "Live" Production

1. The musician's area. Even if there's an orchestra pit, it is better for the visual interest of the studio audience to have the musicians on stage -- if the ensemble is small enough and the stage large enough.
2. "Retiring" area. A row of folding chairs where the actors sit when not standing at the mics. Crowd noises can be done from here as well. Commonly, all actors remain on stage from the beginning of the play to the end.
3. Foley area.
4. Playing area. The actors should be as far downstage as possible, without

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compromising sight lines. Use only as many mics as absolutely necessary to avoid feedback and phasing problems. The actors stand in this area, never sit. They do not use music stands as in the sound studio, but hold scripts in their downstage hands.

**5.** Floor director's area. The floor director moves about so that the stage personnel can see his or her hand signals (see **HAND SIGNALS** in **DIRECTING** chapter above). The director is in the booth, where s/he can hear the mix over speakers or earphones. The director communicates with the floor director via a headset so that the latter can pass the former's instructions on via gestures. Although a floor director is not absolutely necessary, the presence of one adds to the visual interest of the studio audience. The floor director can and often does double as stage manager.

**6.** A mike hangs over the studio audience to capture its laughter and applause. For the *home* audience, the response of the studio audience is an essential part of the show, especially with comedy.

**7.** Speakers. The actors and musicians need little amplification for the studio audience, but the sfx do. The speakers must be so arranged as to minimize leakage and eliminate feedback.

**8.** The house manager hovers in the rear of the auditorium, doing crowd control and coordinating the start and end of the program with the floor director/stage manager.

**THE BOOTH.** If there is no booth above or behind the auditorium, the sound crew sets up the mixing board as far back as possible. Ideally, lights and sound are controlled from the booth. On a signal from the house manager or floor director, the house and stage lights are cross-faded at the beginning and the end of the program. Prerecorded sfx are manipulated here and all sounds mixed for transmission or recording. The director and producer remain in this area, where they can guide all personnel during performance.

## Tracking and Recording

### The Room

Not every recording room in sound studios easily accommodates audio drama. It is not just a matter of size, but of shape and of baffling or the lack thereof. Some rooms possess several kinds of acoustical characteristics depending upon where the mike and sound source are placed and even at what direction they are pointed. Before committing to a room, check it out. Walk around it clapping your hands loudly. If there's slap anywhere in the room, the space is problematic. Either it will have to be augmented with portable baffles, or you'll have to find a better place. Conversely, a small room may be too dead, adding overtones that make voices sound as if recorded in a coffin.

The acoustics of the control booth are less important. After all, listening with earphones eliminates any overtones the booth may possess. However, both the recording space and booth should be protected from outside noises. Sonic interference can originate from radio frequencies leaking into the electronics, from passing traffic, the air conditioning, the building's elevators or nearby construction. Few studios are totally free from such nuisances. Shielding a room from RF or "floating" a room to prevent rumble cost a fortune. Shock mounts on the mikes and gobos (portable baffles) can help inexpensively. If the only way to control noise from the air conditioning is to turn off, you may have to provide your cast and crew with frequent breaks. The location of the studio is also a factor. Is it on a busy or quiet street, on a low or high floor?

You have to check these things out for yourself. The studio boss and engineer probably are not the greatest sources of information on noise control. One studio owner assured me that the room I wished to use was well-shielded from the adjacent room. It was — for music, but not for speech. Acoustical instruments are much louder than the human speaking voice. When my engineer turned up the gain for my actors, he brought up music, especially the bass, leaking from next door.

As important as its acoustical characteristics is the room's lighting. Do the players have enough light to read from without strain? Is there glare? Many of the larger rooms I've seen in the U.S. are designed for musicians, who apparently musicians prefer subdued illumination.

### Miking

I am not going into the various makes and models of microphones, except to note that not all work well with the spoken human voice. Further, those that work well for close miking the human voice may not give satisfactory results when used for area miking. Your studio and engineer ought to be on top of the best and latest at their disposal. Consistency is important when you use several mikes in a scene. The mikes should have near identical pick-up characteristics and frequency response. Otherwise, characters supposedly in the same environment will sound as if they're continents apart.

**Setting Levels.** The first step in any session at the mikes is getting the volume levels right. The actors say a few lines while the engineer makes adjustments. The actors, too, must make adjustments with the engineer's help, to fix their best on-mike position. To help them hit their mark at every take, you may choose to "spike" their positions by placing duck or masking tape down where they're toes should go.

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**Peak limiting.** Set the AGC so that it only brings down the volume of "peaks," or loudest sounds. This will prevent distortion, while preserving most of the frequencies you need to fiddle with later in the mix. The AGC should be used only on voice tracks.

**Group Miking:** One omni-directional mike covers all, possibly with some strategic spotlighting with one or more directional mikes. In a stereo production, the players move around the stereo field according to the blocking (see BLOCKING IN STEREO above). Few American studios, beyond the better ADR facilities, are configured and accoutered to accommodate area miking. You need a fairly large, high ceilinged, well-cushioned space with even acoustical characteristics throughout the space. (At Sveriges Riksradio in Stockholm, I saw one medium-sized rectangular studio designed with a live side and a dead side.) Gobos can help make a room more suitable for group miking, but it's better if you and your cast don't have to fight the room.

If you're working in stereo, your foley walker has to move around to wherever the sounds are supposed to originate. When working in mono, the foley can get its own area of the studio with mikes appropriately chosen and placed for best pick-up. Foley set-up may take a while, so bring your foley walker in before the actors so as not to waste their time.

**Close Miking:** One mike per actor, or perhaps two actors sharing a bidirectional mike. For stereo, the voices either have to be panned to the right stereo position as you record or isolated on separate tracks to be panned later in the mix. You may want to use separate tracks even in mono, to provide you more control over gain and leakage. Close miking takes advantage of the proximity effect, but creates other problems, especially popping. As part of your advance work, check to see if the studio has a supply of pop filters. There are two basic types, one that fits over the mike like a false nose and one disk-shaped filter that is positioned in front of the mike's business end. Too many mikes hot in a smallish space can cause phase cancellation. Therefore, when a mike is idle for a stretch of lines, the engineer should mute it.

**Music Stands.** Some producers like to give actors music stands for their scripts. A clip-on lamp supplements the general lighting. The stand is padded to reduce paper noise and metallic overtones on the voice. I, for one, find that music stands get in the players' way. Actors should hold their scripts in most instances. Stands work okay when you have just a few close-miked speakers in the scene at one time, when your tracking solo narration, or when the actor's hands are arthritic or shaky.

**Movement.** You and your director have to diligently keep talent from undo movement, especially leaning into the mike, which many actors tend to do. Even looking down into the script or from one page to another, can make an alterable difference in level.

**E.Q.** Equalization should be neutral as you lay tracks down. You want to lay down a full range of frequencies. Adjust, if, necessary, in post. Adjustments made at the wrong time can seriously limit your options at the right time.

**Room Tone.** Every performance space lays some presence, or room tone, on the tracks laid down therein. When recording for possible editing in post, always lay down a generous amount of room tone to keep handy. This is sometimes called a silence track, as all that's on it is the ambient and barely noticeable flow of air in the recording space when all is still. In post, when you're editing in a pause fill the pause with room tone. Otherwise, all sound will shut down noticeably for the duration. This is, perhaps, more important while working in analogue media, which tend to make such drop-outs more pronounced than the quieter digital methods.

**Back up.** Whenever practicable, preserve your raw tracks on a back up medium. My current engineer records simultaneously into his computer and on DATs.

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### Slating and Track Sheets

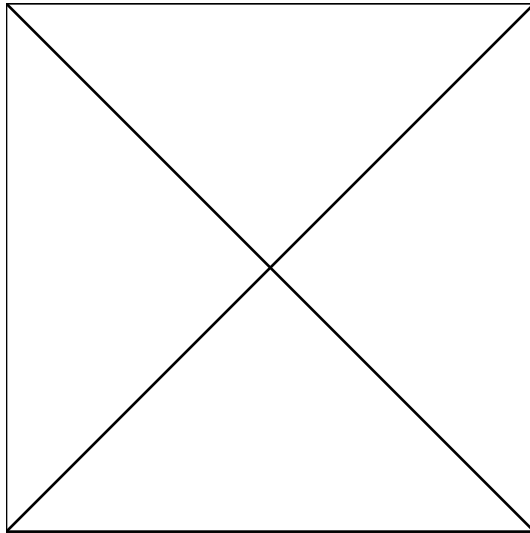
To facilitate editing, each take should be slated. Usually this means that the recordist announces the scene (or script and line numbers) and take I.D.

"Act 2, scene 2, take 1"

"Page 4, line 2 to line 6, wild track"

In the analogue world, a "slate tone" — an electronic note of low frequency — is automatically laid down under the recordist's voice. Later, when the tape is fast forwarded or reversed, the tone becomes a high beep, allow you to find takes quickly during the edit. In the digital realm slate tones are superfluous.

On the other hand, track sheets are always advisable.



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### Stereo

I find few artistic reasons for working in stereo and several compelling ones for not doing it. Most of your listeners will be either hearing your show in mono or in an unsatisfactory stereo set-up. Stereo limits some of audio theater's fluidity of time and place. It's expensive and time consuming to produce. On the other hand, large cast plays, lush mixes and music-heavy productions gain a clarity and definition in stereo impossible in mono. If I don't have a compelling reason to work in stereo, I prefer not to.

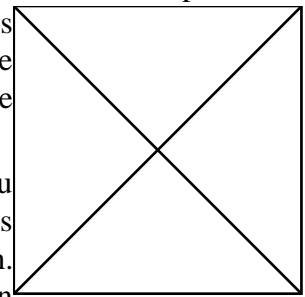
As with mono, you have two basic options for tracking in stereo.

**Group miking.** With a stereo mike or two mikes set up as a "stereo pair," you position and move talent and foley left and right, forward and back as required by the stereo blocking. The effect thus produced seems organic and well-blended. Audiences listening in mono are not likely to lose sounds placed near extreme right or left. To ensure that quiet sounds don't get lost, you can "spotlight" by placing an individual mike before the source and panning it on the console to the correct stereo position. To track properly this way, you need a large, high-ceilinged and relatively dead environment so that sounds bouncing off the walls do not add unwanted overtones. (As mentioned in the "Overview" above, such facilities are hard to come by and expensive.) You also have to take precious rehearsal time to teach the stereo blocking to the talent and foley walkers.

One reason why you need a large space for group miking is that you need to back the actors away quite a bit from the mike to avoid "wandering." If the actors are too close, every time they look up or down, they'll jump in stereo. As you have to keep a distance of three feet or more and still get an on-mike effect, not only the room, but the mike and even the wiring have to be just right. Aberrations in any of those areas can add hash, unwanted noise.

**Close Miking.** Each voice and sound gets its own mike. You handle stereo placement by adjusting pan pots on the console or their digital equivalent. You may either adjust for stereo as you record or, isolating each mike on a separate track, worry about it later as you mix. Lack of access to the kind of facility needed for group tracking forces close miking upon you. One mike per sound provides precise stereo placement, control over unwanted ambient noises by dipping tracks when they're not needed, and flexibility in adjusting the volume of various discrete tracks to satisfactory and audible relative levels.

However, this method adds days, if not weeks, to post production. You have to beware of phasing problems caused by having too many mikes hot at one time while tracking. The *mis en scène* can lose integration. Sounds near far right and left can get lost, the apparent relative levels can change radically depending on the listener's sitting off stereo center, or not having his right and left channels balanced properly, or having his EQ adjusted too light or too dark.



### Location Recording

I am by no means an expert on location, or "field," recording. In my very limited experience, I'm very pleased with the results I've gotten, not just for realistic ambiances and overtones, but for conveying the sense of movement. Outdoor scenes, so difficult to lay down in the studio are best done outdoors, granted easy access to appropriate environments. When I was working on a series in Santa Monica, we taped most outdoor scenes in the studios parking lot.

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When we needed extra quiet, as, say, for country locations, we taped outdoor scenes on early weekend mornings when we could anticipate little or no nearby traffic. Light-weight portable equipment is cheaper and more flexible than ever these days. If you cannot get your hands on a suitable recording facility, you might even consider location work a superior alternative to making do with an acoustically inferior room.

## Post-Production

### Editing

Editing proceeds in various steps throughout post-production. The first edit is an assembly of the good takes in sequential order. Once assembled, the performances have to be edited again to remove pops, mouth noises and fine tune the actors' timing by adding desired pauses and eliminating undesirable ones. The addition, or overdubbing of music and pre-recorded sound effects may require further edits to make room for them.

The only engineers I've met who enjoy this part of the process are not cases who get a benefit from it as occupational therapy. It is energy-sapping. Fortunately, the digital domain, depending on the equipment and software) can greatly speed the process and remove much of the aggravation. Further, it enables "non-destructive" edits. You don't physically slice away a quantity of recording tape with a razor blade, you merely sort of set it aside. You can always retrieve anything you've "cut" until, if and when you wipe it off your hard-drive or record over your DAT to make room for another production.

### Overdubbing

The recipe, more or less in the following order, is as follows:

- Add atmospheres, music and sound effects.
- Add reverb and other special effects.
- Place everything in proper stereo position.

Note that nothing important goes only on one channel; no signal comes out all the way left or right, because someone listening in less than optimal conditions may lose one of the channels.

- Adjust EQ as necessary so that scenic elements sound like they're all in the same space.

Outdoor scenes should be set brighter than indoor scenes.

The play's overall EQ should be slightly sharp and penetrating, so as to penetrate competing noises in your audience's listening environment.

### The Mix

Adjust levels to their final settings. Here is when you adjust AGC to do more than limit peaks. Still adjusting only on voice tracks, you "compress" the actors' tracks so that the very quietest bits come up and the very loudest bits come down. There is only so much gain riding you can do manually. You may have to make different settings for different scenes. For normal ones, you don't want to over-do it. However, when your characters are speaking over a loud background, you may need to step up the compression so that none of their lines get lost under the din. On some occasions, musical beds need to be compressed if the dynamic range changes suddenly and intermittently obscuring the lines.

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Getting the levels right may take several passes, adjusting first the voices, then the background, then fine tuning the voices, then the background again, and finally making sure that volume of individual scenes or beats have a smooth median level throughout.

With the right software, almost all of these settings are done digitally and can be automated. The console can be ignored, except for setting playback levels in the booth. If you do not have automation available, every pass has to be individually adjusted. The mix has to be done piece meal with adjustments recorded on empty tracks and then edited together. In such a case, I hope you and your engineer take thorough notes.

## Packaging

The packaging, also called wrap-arounds, includes all necessary announcements and public service or commercial spots, pauses and beds for local station breaks . Your final fully-mixed master should not include the packaging, though you may wish to attach musical beds for announcements and breaks. This is allows you to customize the play for different uses. You may require one kind of packaging for broadcast that includes acknowledgement to the network or distributor, one or more pause of sixty to 120 seconds for breaks and a "systems cue" before the breaks and at the end of the program. You may need announcements for the top and bottom of each side of cassettes and another set for the beginning and end CDs (see CREDITS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS in the appendix below). Download and satellite release may require their own packaging.

At his writing, it is common for the packaging to include electronic indexes on CDs every three or so minutes. Usually the publisher adds this before mass-producing copies for sale and rental. There's a practical reason for this in audiobooks. Listeners play audiobooks in chunks, for the duration of their commutes or endurance. They need to stop and turn off the CD and find their place when they continue listening. That's what the indexes are for. Plays are meant to be heard entirely in one sitting, or one episode at a time. Therefore, I recommend indexing only after each act or, if the episodes are a half-hour long or less, after each episode. This is because the inaudible indexes can inadvertently add brief pauses where they occur. Since acts and episode end with a pause anyway, an index at those points can't degrade your program.



## Audio Dramatist's Lexicon

I have included here terms that prove handy either as professional shorthand or conceptual reminders. Some terms come from theater, some from broadcasting, some from criticism. Theatrical argot tends toward fluidity, so, where more than one sense of a word exists, or when a precise sense is not universal, I have included only those definitions useful to audio dramatists. When more than one meaning commonly arises, as with such terms as atmosphere and track, the meaning is usually clear from the context. For more technical terms related to audio and acoustics, go online for The Rane Dictionary and The Recording Institute Glossary. Digital technology is increasing the audio dramatist's vocabulary faster than I can take note of it; hence the paucity of digital references below.

### A

ACOUSTIC. 1) *n.* A sonic overtone; 2) *adj.* acoustical.

ACOUSTICAL. Not electronic or prerecorded; analogue [*q.v.*]; produced mechanically, manually, or vocally.

ACT. 1) *n.* Originally, the major division of dramatic action [*q.v.*] within a play; on the contemporary stage, the major division of a play on opposite sides of intermission(s); in broadcasting, the major division of a tele- or audio play separated by breaks; 2) *v.*, to perform a role in a dramatic production; 3) bum, comedian, mummer, player, talent [*q.v.*], Thespian (after Thespis, the legendary inventor of Greek tragedy), tragedian; an often infuriating, ultimately likable, neurotic — plagued by narcissistic disorders that compound a hopeless addiction to an impossible profession.

ACTUALITY. *n.* Unrehearsed or documentary sound, speech or music recorded in the field.

ADR STUDIO, ADR ROOM. A studio designed for "automated dialog replacement," the process of recording a new vocal performance by an actor to replace an existing performance acoustically [*q.v.*] union that has jurisdiction over radio and audio.

*v.*, to make a living performing roles in dramatic production; to be an actor.

ACTION, DRAMATIC. Gesture, action or dialogue that advances the plot of a dramatic work.

ACTION, FALLING. Action following the climax [*q.v.*], in which tension wanes and loose ends are tied up.

ACTION, RISING. Action leading up to the climax [*q.v.*], characterized by mounting tension.

ACTOR. *n.* One who acts, variously called

flawed but visually acceptable. In the U.S. where audio drama rooms do not exist, ADR studios are often acoustically right for audio drama.

AFFILIATE. *n.* A station accepting programs or services under contract from, but not owned by, a national or regional network [*q.v.*]. See also independent, o & o.

AFM. The American Federation of Musicians; the musicians' union.

AFTRA. The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists; the talent

AGENT, CASTING. A licensed professional who assists producers with casting.

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AGENT, LITERARY. A licensed professional who represents writers before publishers and producers.

AGENT, TALENT. A licensed professional who helps actors get work. A theatrical agent specializes in dramatic television, film, and theater; a commercial agent handles TV and radio commercials and voice-overs.

AGC. See AUTOMATIC GAIN CONTROL.

AIR CHECK. A recording of a program made by the broadcaster during broadcast for archival or legal purposes.

ALLITERATION. *n.* The purposeful repetition of sounds, particularly the beginning consonants of words. "The fickle finger of fate."

AMBIENCE. *n.* A sound bed [*q.v.*] used in lieu of scenery to indicate environment or setting. Also called atmosphere.

AMBIENCE TRACK. *n.* A track [*q.v.*] devoted to atmospheres.

ANALOG or ANALOGUE. *adj.* pertaining to non-digital or pre-digital audio recording and playback technologies, such as magnetic recording tape. See DIGITAL.

ANTAGONIST. *n.* A character whose dramatic function is to oppose the protagonist [*q.v.*]; the bad guy.

ANTICLIMAX. *n.* A minor climax [*q.v.*] or drop in dramatic tension, which, depending on how it's used, can enhance the climax, dilute it, and produce numerous wanted or unwanted effects.

ARCHETYPE. *n.* The first, prototypical, and quintessential expression of a theme, character type, style, genre [*q.v.*], etc.

ARGUMENT. A summary or short statement of the plot or subject of a literary work.

ARIA. *n.* In opera, a solo number; hence, in drama, any long speech that suspends the flow of dramatic action, especially a long, reflective soliloquy [*q.v.*].

ASIDE. *n.* A dramatic convention in which a character speaks his inner thoughts aloud to himself; or speaks in a stage whisper [*q.v.*]

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS. A membership association of U.S. composers, songwriters, lyricists, and music publishers of every kind of music that licenses and distributes royalties for the non-dramatic public performances of their copyrighted works. See also BROADCAST MUSIC, INC.

ANAGNORISIS. [Greek "recognition"] *n.* In drama, a character's self-revelation or self-discovery, especially one that precipitates a turning point in the action.

ANALEPSIS, *n.*, in literature, a flashback (*q.v.*).

ARISTOTLE. Among his achievements, this Greek philosopher (384-322 BC) was the first dramatic theorist of the Western World. His *Poetics*, apparently written as lecture notes, describes Greek Tragedy and attempts to explain how it moves an audience. Aristotelian terms and principles, such as hubris, puerility and catharsis, are still useful to critics and dramatists.

ART, AUDIO. A type of audio production akin to "performance art," which may or may not include dramatic elements.

ARTISTIC DISTANCE. A psychological distance between fictive events of a literary or dramatic work and the life experience of the audience, theoretically necessary before the work can be appreciated as art. Theoretically, if a work relates too personally to the audience, the audience will lose its aesthetic objectivity.

to another character or the audience, as if the other characters in the scene can't hear him/her. In radio, asides are often

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distinguished from regular speech by a change of sound quality, mike position, or filter, rather than by a stage whisper.

ASPIRATION. The vocal sound made by turbulent airflow preceding or following vocal fold vibration, as in "ha" or "ah."

ASSEMBLY. *n.* 1) The first part of the editing process in which outtakes are removed from the masters and the remaining keepers [*q.v.*] are edited in sequential order, 2) the tracks [*q.v.*] so assembled.

ASCAP. See American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.

ATMOSPHERE. *n.* 1) See ambience; 2) The prevailing mood (calm, mysterious, gay, etc.) of a play or other work of fiction; 3) (television) extras, supernumeraries, walla.

dramatic or narrative speech.

AUDIO DRAMA. See Drama, Audio.

AUTEUR. *n.* From cinema criticism. A producer or director of a dramatic production, who creates such a strong and pervasive artistic vision over a stage, optisonic [*q.v.*] or audio production, often contributing decisively to the script, that s/he is for all intents and purposes, the production's author, no matter how many other creative persons contribute to it. The term is rarely used in the theater, because a production most often needs to be fixed and definitive before it can be said to have an auteur. American radio drama auteurs include Norman Corwin, Tom Lopez, and Orson Welles, also a cinema auteur.

AUTHOR. *n.* In copyright law, the person entitled to hold a copyright, usually the "author" in the usual sense, but not always, as in a "work for hire" situation, in which the individual or organization commissioning a be fully exposed.

BACK TIME. *v.t.* To determine the length of a program fragment, or to line up two production elements, such as selected lines and a musical bed, by timing them backwards from their end points.

ATTACK. 1) *v.* to begin a scene, line or action; 2) *n.* the beginning of a scene, line or action; 3) *n.*, an approach or concept for the production of a drama, writing of a script, playing of a role, or reading of a line.

AUDIO. 1) *n.*, Electronically enhanced, recorded, or broadcast sound; 2) *adj.* of or pertaining to such sound or sound technology.

AUDIO ART. *n.* A kind of performance art that often includes dramatic as well as other elements, designed for sound recording or radio.

AUDIOBOOK. *n.* a commercial sound recording, usually on cassette or compact disk, of a narrator reading a literary work aloud; hence, any commercial recording of

work may become the author for copyright purposes.

AUTOMATIC GAIN CONTROL or AGC. *n.* An electronic device for automatically regulating volume.

AUTO SLATE. *n.* A "silent" digital version of movie clap sticks.

## B

BACK. A script indication signaling that a sound or voice is in the background. Usually applied to outdoor sounds. See OFF MIKE.

BACKGROUND MUSIC. *n.* See music, background.

BACK STORY. *n.* Background information on the characters or events of a drama that need to be revealed during the action [*q.v.*] so that the ramifications of the action can

BAFFLE or SOUND BAFFLE. 1) *n.* A partition used in studio to isolate or cushion sound; 2) *v.* to isolate or cushion sound by using a portable partition.

BALANCE. 1) *n.* in audio, the relative levels between channels of a stereo [*q.v.*] production, or of individual sounds in any

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audio production; 2) *v.* to adjust levels or stereo position to achieve a desired effect; 3) in the theater, when actors are positioned to make best use of the performing area without crowding each other, the stage is said to be "balanced;" to "balance the stage" is for actors to spread out from a cramped or crowded grouping.

**BATHOS.** *n.* Excessive pathos, often unintentionally funny.

**BEAT.** *n.* A stage direction indicating a brief pause the length of one stroke in the rhythm of the scene, signified by the expression BEAT or an ellipsis (. . .); the smallest unit of dramatic action; it is sometimes handy for preparation, rehearsal or taping purposes to tape is used for recording on a machine biased for another type.

**BIBLE.** A treatment for a dramatic serial, series, or soap showing the continuity over a number of episodes.

**BILLBOARD.** 1) *n.* The opening announcements to a program; 2) *v.* To make or record these announcements.

**BILL.** *v.* To advertise, publish, identify, or announce the name of an artist or artists involved in a production.

**BILLING.** *n.* The order and manner of publishing or announcing the names of the artists involved in a particular production; hence TOP BILLING, the artist mentioned most prominently.

**BINAURAL SOUND.** A method of recording in conventional stereo [*q.v.*] that gives the listener the impression, not only of right and left, but also up and down, forward and back. The listener must wear earphones to perceive the binaural effect.

volume, stereo position, EQ, etc.. Also called CONSOLE or BOARD.

**BOOM.** *n.* A hand-operated mechanical "arm," in a wide array of sizes, to assist in holding a device (such as a microphone) at a desired point where an arm is not possible or practical.

divide scenes into beats or French scenes [*q.v.*].

**BED.** *n.* Sound or music playing continuously under speech, as a musical bed for announcements, or a sound bed (ambience) under a scene.

**BG.** *n.* Background.

**BIAS.** *n.* An ultrasonic tone that an analogue tape recorder inserts on the tape while recording, to prevent sound distortion. Different types and brands of tapes require different biases during recording. Distortion may result when one type of

**BLANK VERSE.** A type of verse popular in verse drama because it approximates the rhythm of natural prose speech in English. It is unrhymed iambic pentameter — that is, lines of five iambs, i.e., metrical feet consisting of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, as in "The rose is in the garden of the king."

**BLOCK.** *v.* To design the flow of movement and traffic patterns of objects (such as vehicles) and characters in a play, such as the placement of their entrances, exits and crosses [*q.v.*]; hence, to teach the blocking to, or work it out with, the performers during rehearsal.

**BLOCKING.** *n.* The choreographed movement of a play.

**BMI.** See BROADCAST MUSIC, INC.

**BOARD, MIXING.** The dashboard of the sound studio housing the main controls for

**BOOM CHANNEL.** (Also called "low frequency effects.") Very low frequency sounds that are fed only to a subwoofer.

**BOOM MICROPHONE, or BOOM MIKE.** See MICROPHONE, BOOM.

**BOOK RATE.** *n.* The prices that a commercial sound studio publishes for its services. The book rate may have no

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relationship to real prices, except as a starting point for haggling.

BOOTH. *n.* The control room of a studio.

BOUNCE. *v.t.* to move the signal [*q.v.*] from one track [*q.v.*] or recording to another.

BOY also JUVENILE. *n.* The youthful male love interest in a play; an actor playing the role or specializing in such roles.

BREAK. 1) *n.* An interruption in the program for announcements such as commercials and station I.D.s; 2) *v.* to interrupt a program in this way.

American performing rights organization that represents more than 250,000 songwriters, composers and music publishers. BMI collects money from the businesses that use music in the course of their day and then pays out that money as royalties to the composers and publishers of the songs and compositions they play. See also ASCAP.

BUILD. 1) *v.t.* to increase the emotional level of a speech, sequence, scene, or act; 2) *n.*, the increase thus made; 3) *v.t.*, to overdub [*q.v.*].

BUTT SPLICE. 1) *v.* In editing, to join cues tightly together; 2) *n.* a splice so made.

## C

CADENCE. *n.* 1) A falling inflection of the voice, as at the end of a sentence; 2) General inflection or modulation of the voice.

CADENCE, DESCENDING. *n.* A monotonous vocal pattern in which the voice descends in pitch to the same musical note a call-back.

CALL, CASTING. *n.* An audition session.

CALL, CATTLE. *n.* An audition session in which actors are herded in and out as quickly as possible, so that they have only a few minutes to show what they can do; often a general (*q.v.*).

CALL, GENERAL (or *general audition*, or *generals*), *n.*, a casting call in which the entire acting community of a region is invited to try-out for one or more theater

BREAKDOWN/BREAKDOWNS. (The singular and plural are used interchangeably.) *n.* Written project description used for casting purposes, of which the most important parts are thumbnail descriptions of the cast of characters.

BREAK-UP. *n.* A distortion of sound caused by over-modulation in which the sound becomes fuzzy or intermittent.

BRIDGE. 1) *n.* Sound or, most commonly, music linking two scenes; 2) *v.* to employ a bridge.

BROADCAST MUSIC, INC (BMI). An in the same rhythm at the end of most or all phrases or sentences.

CALIBRATION. The adjustment of reading devices, especially on a recorder, to conform to either a determined standard or another device.

CALIBRATION TONES (also TEST tones). See tones, calibration.

CALL. *n.* The time and date at which one or more production personnel are scheduled to begin a casting session, rehearsal, taping, or posting session. "My call tomorrow is for 6 in the morning, but Tiffany doesn't have to show up 'til noon."

CALL BACK or CALLBACK or CALL-BACK. 1) *n.* A secondary or follow-up casting call, during which talent who have appeared at a previous call are called back to audition further; 2) *v.* to hold

companies, but not for any specific role or play.

CALL SHEET. See Sheet, Call.

CAMEO. *n.* A secondary or tertiary role in a dramatic work, sometimes lasting no more than one scene, that is played by a name who normally accepts only major roles.

CANCELLATION, PHASE. See PHASE.

CAN, IN THE. Finished, recorded. "The tracks are in the can."

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**CANNED.** *adj.* Removed or recorded, not benefiting from the synergetic interaction of spectators and performers sharing the same space, said of performance media such as video, cinema, and audio; prerecorded, as canned laughter.

**CANS.** *n.* Earphones.

**CARRIER.** *n.* 1) A radio frequency wave that can be sent long distances by transmitting it from an antenna; 2) a station or network that picks up a given syndicated program.

productions.

**CASTING.** *n.* The process of choosing talent for dramatic production.

**CASTING CALL.** *n.* See **CALL**, **CASTING**.

**CATHARSIS.** (from a Greek word meaning purgation) The effect narrative and musical art sometimes have on an audience of purging it of or purifying its emotions, especially the emotions of fear and pity.

**CATTLE CALL.** See **CALL**, **CATTLE**.

**CD QUALITY.** *adj.* An industry phrase denoting that a recorded or transmitted audio signal is comparable to sound recorded on a compact disk; that is, high quality.

**CHANNEL.** *n.* The electronic horizontal division of recording tape for stereo or multitrack recording, synonymous with track.

**CHARACTER MAN/WOMAN.** An actor or actress specializing in mature roles or roles

**CLOSE-MIKE.** *v.* To track each actor with his or her individual microphone, which requires close proximity of actor and mike. Close-micing adds warmth to the voice (called **THE PROXIMITY EFFECT**) and reduces the signal to noise ratio.

**CLOSET DRAMA.** See **drama**, **closet**.

**COLD.** *adj.* and *adv.* Unrehearsed, as to lay down tracks cold, or without even seeing the script in advance, as in a cold reading.

**COLLOQUY.** *n.* An extended passage of dialogue between two characters in a play.

**COMMEDIA DEL' ARTE.** *n.* A popular, long-lived and seminal theatrical genre

**CART.** 1) *n.* A cartridge containing tape that can be instantly cued; 2) *v.* to transfer a recording to cart.

**CAST.** 1) *n.* The talent hired to play the characters in a dramatic production, or the characters themselves (cast of characters or *dramatis personae*); 2) *v.* to choose and hire the talent for one or more dramatic

that call for great skill with superficial detail, such as regional accents and physical quirks.

**CHORUS.** *n.* 1) A narrator, as in the Elizabethan theater; 2) the group of singers and dancers of the ancient Greek theater who performed choral odes commenting on the action between scenes, and who, singly and as a group, interacted with the actors during the scenes; 3) the singing and dancing ensemble of a musical theater production; 4) any character or characters in a dramatic work whose dramatic function is to comment on the action.

**CLIMAX.** *n.* The highest point of tension in the dramatic action.

**CLIP.** *v.* 1) To cut off the beginning or end of a syllable, sound or musical note, usually by accident, as in a bad edit or improper setting of a sound-processing device, such as a noise gate [*q.v.*]; 2) to rush; to top[*q.v.*].

originating in Renaissance Italy, typified by stereotyped characters played by actors wearing masks, improvisation, recurring gags, and physical humor; it profoundly influenced Molière, Chaplin, Buster Keaton, the early Marx Brothers, burlesque and vaudeville comedy, Punch and Judy Shows, mime, circus clowns, and contemporary improvisational comedy.

**COMEDIAN.** *n.* 1) A performer of any kind specializing in comedy; 2) an actor specializing in comedy; 3) (poetic or archaic) an actor, even one who performs serious plays.

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COMEDY. *n.* A play intended primarily to amuse; any play, especially a romantic one, with a happy ending, or employing comic structure.

COMEDY, SITUATION. *n.* A type of comedy, usually domestic, in which characters are made to react absurdly to farcical situations.

dramatic action that intensifies the conflict or a previous complication.

COMPRESSION. *n.* A type of automatic gain control (AGC) that reduces loudness above a preset ceiling and amplifies sounds below a preset floor.

COMPRESSOR. *n.* A device for effecting compression.

CONFLICT. *n.* A factor or person that opposes the protagonist and causes tension.

CONSOLE. *n.* See MIXING BOARD.

CONTACT SHEET. See SHEET, CONTACT.

CONVENTION. *n.* A stereotype artifice that an audience agrees to accept, as, in drama, an aside, or, in audio drama, a three-legged horse, a musical bridge or, for that matter, background music.

COPY. *n.* Text, as in "announce copy," the text the announcer is to read.

COPYRIGHT. *n.* A legal protection of an artistic or literary intellectual property, such as a script or audio production, against somewhat like a timer, to count the expenditure of tape as it winds on the take-up reel; 2) *v.* in theater, to make as an actor an unmotivated movement on stage that balances the stage picture, hence, in a radio play, to pan a voice or sound to balance the stereo field.

CURTAIN LINE. The final line of a scene, act or play that provides a kind of punctuation, a sense of conclusion, or suspense.

COVER, *v.int.* In stage parlance, to position oneself on stage so that your back is mostly or completely to the audience. One is thus

COMMERCIAL SOUND STUDIO. A sound studio that hires out its facilities, equipment and engineers to ad agencies, producers, and others, but produces little, if anything of its own.

COMPLICATION. *n.* A factor in the

unauthorized use; to legally protect an intellectual property, especially by registering a published work with the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress.

COPYRIGHT, COMMON LAW. A legal protection of an unpublished intellectual property, created when an author (or producer) mails the property to him/herself and keeps the sealed mailing container, the cancellation date of which provides the protection. Once a fairly common practice, common law copyrighting has diminished since the revamping of the U.S. copyright law in the 1980s.

CORE. A hub around which recording tape or film is wound for storage, to save money by conserving reels.

COUNTER, *n.* 1) in the studio, a device,

said to be in a covered position. See UNCOVER.

CRISIS. A minor or major point in the dramatic action in which the risk arising from conflict or complication requires a response from the protagonist.

CROSS. 1) *v.* To move across the stage or, in radio theater, across the stereo field; 2) *n.* a movement thus made.

CROSSFADE. 1) *n.* The simultaneous reduction of one sound, set of sounds or scene and simultaneously raising of another; 2) *v.* to make a crossfade.

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CROSSTALK. See PRINT-THROUGH.

CUE. 1) *v.* to give a beginning signal, as when the director points to the actor or the studio cue light goes on; hence, to deliver a line, effect or musical passage that signals another line, effect or musical passage; 2) *n.* a beginning signal such as in the above

or phrase of the speech.

CUE OUT. The sound or line that ends the tape or program, and that cues the live station engineer or announcer to go on with whatever is next.

CUE SHEET. See SHEET, CUE.

CUE, SYSTEMS. Same as cue out, usually consisting of the name and audio logo of the program's distributor.

CURTAIN. The final punctuation mark of a major division in a dramatic work; in theater, a black out, fade-out or lowering of the stage curtain; in audio drama, a fade-out, musical passage, or ring-out of a sound effect.

CURTAIN LINE. The last line of an act or play, usually, in the former instance, giving the audience a sense of anticipation for the next act, or, in the latter, giving a sense of finality; so-called because, on stage, it is the line that cues the curtain to fall.

DEAD ROOM. A studio with neutral acoustics used to record outdoor scenes.

DEAL MEMO. In show business and elsewhere, a summary of contract stipulations, sometime used in lieu of a contract, but most often as a preliminary document.

DECAY. *n.* The diminution of sound, especially residual or ambient sound, such as an echo; also ring out.

DECIBEL or DB. *n.* A unit of sound volume.

DELIVER. *v.* 1) To speak a line effectively; 2) to get a product (in our case, a program) to consumers (audiences), which, in audio drama, could be by commercial recording, broadcast, cable cast, satellite radio, or live presentation.

examples; 3) the beginning or end of a sound, musical passage or line of dialogue.

CUE IN. The first line, sound or music of a program or tape.

CUE, OPERATIVE. The operative cue is the word or phrase in a line that motivates another character to speak or perform an action, even though it is not the final word

CUT. 1) *v.* To edit; 2) *n.* an edit; 3) *v.* to record, as "to cut a track;" 4) *v.* (command) stop!

CUT TO: *v.* To transition instantly from one scene to another.

## D

DAT. *n.* Digital audio tape, a compact cartridge, like a miniature video tape cartridge, that stores electronic information that can be transformed into sound in the playback.

DAW. See DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION.

dbx ® – A brand name for a device that reduces unwanted noise in an analog recording.

DEAD. *adj.* Lacking reverberation and overtones, said of an acoustical environment.

DELIVERY. 1) The affective speaking of lines by an actor — the employment of cadence, timbre, quality, volume, etc. to imbue lines with meaning, emotion, beauty, and interest; 2) the method or system by which a program or product is put before audiences or consumers; delivery system.

DENOUEMENT. *n.* (from Fr., "end") dramatic action following the climax that resolves the plot; the falling action.

DESIGNER, SOUND. An audio engineer who assumes principal artistic responsible for composing and orchestrating sounds, music and voices in a production.

DEUS EX MACHINA. *n.* (from Gr., "God out of the Machine") An improbable or inorganic (see ORGANIC) plot contrivance to resolve



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the various complications of the dramatic action, such as the cavalry coming to the rescue, an unexpected inheritance, or a sudden remission.

of words; the vocabulary and syntax of a literary work; 2) the clear pronunciation and enunciation of consonants and vowels.

**DIGITAL.** *adj.* Pertaining to a method of turning sound informations [q.v.] into computer or electronic informations and then back again for recording, processing, and playing back; as opposed to analogue [q.v.] methods.

**DIGITAL AUDIO WORK-STATION (DAW)** – A computer with software capable of recording, editing, playing back, and otherwise manipulating audio. It is possible to produce entire radio programs on a DAW.

**DIPLOPHONIC.** *adj.* A diplophonic voice is one in which two simultaneous pitches are perceived.

**DIRECTION.** *n.* The guidance and instructions of the director, as in the phrase "to take direction," meaning to follow the director's orders, something actors are not equally capable of doing.

or a purely fictive work, the documentary elements of which contribute to a sense of realism and immediacy.

**DOLBY.** A brand name. The Dolby company owns and licenses various technologies for noise reduction during recording and separately to allow surround sound reproduction during broadcast and film/video viewing.

**DOPPLER EFFECT.** An apparent pitch change that takes place as a sound approaches (getting higher) or recedes (getting lower) from a sound receiver.

**DRAG or DRAG ROLE.** A role in a dramatic work that requires a man to impersonate a woman.

**DRAMA.** (as opposed to theater [q.v.]): 1) The field of performance art concerned with the acting out of a story from a written script primarily using speech and movement; especially as pertains to the substantive and

**DIALOGUE.** The words uttered in a play; the lines given actors to speak.

**DICTION.** 1) The artistic choice and order

**DIRECTOR.** In American theater, television, cinema, and audio drama, the person who conducts performances and rehearsals and who supervises, defines, and gives unity to the performances; called, in Britain and elsewhere, the producer.

**DIRECTOR, CASTING.** A person, often licensed, hired to take charge of casting details for a production, series, or theater company.

**DISPLACE ACTION.** To call attention to an unimportant production element at the expense of an important one; to upstage.

**DOCUDRAMA or DOCUMENTARY DRAMA.** A presentation combining elements of theater and documentary; either a dramatization of historical or current events that makes, or purports to make, extensive use of authentic elements,

literary aspects of such performance art; 2) a type of play, serious in tone, but lacking the elevation and fatalism of tragedy.

**DRAMA, AUDIO.** Drama for the ear, whether performed live before an audience or transmitted via radio, cable audio, cassettes, compact disks, or other media; distinguished from play readings by its reliance on the electronic amplification, blending and manipulation of music, sound effects, and voices.

**DRAMA, CLOSET.** A type of play written to be read rather than performed, or a narrative poem cast as a play but meant to be read, e.g. Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Goethe's *Faust*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.

**DRAMA, REMOTE.** Dramatic performance employing technology to reach an audience physically removed from the performance space, and sometimes removed in time as well; the most far-reaching theatrical

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innovation of the twentieth century.

DRAMATIC. *adj.* Pertaining to drama; possessing values appropriate to drama, as considered exclusive of theatrical [*q.v.*] values.

DRAMATIC ACTION. *n.* See ACTION, DRAMATIC.

DRAMATIC LITERATURE. See LITERATURE, DRAMATIC.

DRAMATIC THEORY. See THEORY, DRAMATIC.

DRAMATIST. *n.* A playwright, particularly one who writes with distinction on serious subjects.

DRAMATIST, AUDIO (or RADIO DRAMATIST) *n.* A sonic auteur [*q.v.*]: one who writes, produces and directs audio drama professionally; a great unsung, underpaid and persecuted benefactor of mankind.

DRAMATIZATION. *n.* A dramatic work adapted from a non-dramatic source or sources.

## E

EAR CANDY. Sound elements added for aural richness, but that do not significantly alter the dramatic story-line (bird ambience as opposed to a car crash, for instance).

ECHO. Reverberant sound, acoustically or electronically induced.

ECHO CHAMBER. An acoustic environment that enhances reverberation.

ENSEMBLE. 1) *n.* the quality of a performance in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; that is, the rapport among and the combined performances of the cast have a personality and importance greater than that of the performers individually; a work benefiting from strong ensemble is often called an ENSEMBLE PIECE; 2) *adj.* of such a quality; 3) *n.* a) The cast of a production; b) the performers in a repertory company.

EPIPHANY, EPIPHANAL MOMENT. (from Gr., "showing forth") 1) In drama, especially in tragedy, the protagonist's sudden insight

DROP OUT. *n.* A technical aberration in which sound disappears or drops out of a section or sections of a sound recording.

DRY. *adj.* Lacking sound processing, especially equalization [*q.v.*] and reverb; said of a recording signal [*q.v.*].

DUB. 1) *v.* To copy recorded material; 2) *n.* a copy so made; hence, DUBBING, the copying of recorded material; sometimes refers to the process of mixing. See also OVERDUBBING.

DUMP. *v.t.* In digital recording, to save or store a sound file on a DAT or another medium, in order to free computer memory and disk space.

DYNAMICS. The variation or contrast in volume from the softest to the loudest sounds from a given source.

into his/her condition or circumstances, caused by his/her struggle with antagonistic forces, that leads him/her to take action that brings on the climax or reversal (called by Aristotle anagnorisis); 2) a literary expression introduced by James Joyce to denote a gesture or action that sums up or reveals the essence of a fictional character to an audience.

EPISODE. 1) In broadcasting, a discrete program in a series or serial; 2) in drama, a unified portion of a plot, an incident.

EPISODIC. 1) *adj.* Containing many totally or partially self-contained episodes; 2) used pejoratively, containing too many scenes or episodes, and, hence, structurally weak or unwieldy; 3) *n.* a broadcast series of self-contained episodes, usually melodramas, featuring recurring lead

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characters and any number of transient secondary characters.

EQ. 1) To "equalize," or electronically adjust, the pitch of recorded sound; 2) equalization.

EQUALIZATION. The balance between the various frequencies of sound that affect pitch.

EQUALIZER. An electronic device that adjusts EQ [*q.v.*].

EXCHANGE. *n.* In drama, a more or less unified chunk of dialogue between two or more characters; a question or statement by one character and its response from another.

EXPANDER. *n.* A form of automatic gain control [*q.v.*] that reduces low-level noise or expands the dynamic range of the recorded material.

EXPOSITION. Presentation of information essential to the understanding of the dramatic action, especially of events that

FAIR USE. (law) A stipulation in the Copyright act of 1976 (Section 107) under which some limited "fair use" may be made of a protected work without permission "for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching . . . scholarship or research." Whether fair use includes such things as excerpting sections of commercial recordings for background music in audio drama is not clear.

FARCE. A broad style of comedy that relies on ridiculous situations.

FAST-WIND. To spool or wind tape around a reel or hub at high speed. See also SLOW-WIND.

FAVORED NATIONS or FAVORED NATIONS CLAUSE. A contractual stipulation guaranteeing that no other contractee is receiving more favorable conditions (although others may receive conditions equally favorable).

FLIES. *n.* Area over the stage in a theater, where weights (typically sandbags), curtains, cycloramas, special effects, and

occurred prior to the opening scene or off-stage.

EXPRESSIONISM. A stylized and highly personal form of theater in which reality is distorted by the passionate and distorted vision of the writer.

EXT. *n.* script abbreviation for "exterior."

## F

FADE. 1) *v.* To gradually diminish volume; 2) *n.* a change in volume so made.

FADE OUT. 1) *v.* To gradually lower volume until the sound disappears; 2) *n.* a change in volume so made.

FADE UP. 1) *v.* To gradually raise volume; 2) *n.* a change in volume so made.

FADER. Manually operated, usually sliding, volume control on a mixing console [*q.v.*].

FIELD. 1) An area out of the studio or controlled conditions where a recording is made; recordings thus made are FIELD RECORDINGS; 2) the area before or around a microphone effective for picking up sound.

FILTER. 1) *v.t.* To remove frequencies from a sound to remove unwanted sounds or to produce an effect, such as to reproduce the sound of telephone reception; 2) *n.*, a device that produces such an effect, an equalizer; a script indication prescribing the use of such a device.

FLASHBACK. 1) *v.i.* To show events in retrospect; to interrupt a scene or scenes of current events with a scene, scenes, or scene fragment(s) of past events; 2) *n.*, a retrospective scene; also called *analepsis*; 3) *n.*, an unbidden and spontaneous recall of a past incident, often disturbing, into consciousness; often a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

scenery may be raised and stored out of the audience's view.

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FLOAT. *v.t.* To protect a recording or broadcast environment from outside vibration, as from passing traffic, by building it as an inner room connected to an outer room by shock absorbing springs, or raising a false floor over the real one.

FLUB. 1) *n.* An actor's mistake of delivery; 2) *v.i.* to make such a mistake.

FLYING/ON THE FLY. "Winging it," especially overdubbing or punching in a sound or piece of music without preparation.

FOIL. A character whose dramatic purpose is to set off another character by contrast; a side-kick.

FOLDBACK. *n.* Sound which is fed into an earphone during a recording or ADR session.

the dramatic action within the context of an amplifying situation, which opens and closes, or frames, the main action, as when the play unfolds in retrospect, or in a "play within a play."

FRENCH SCENE. See SCENE, FRENCH.

FRICATIVE. A vocalization — such as the letters f, s, v, and z — produced by forcing breath through a narrow opening in the mouth. These sounds tend to pop [*q.v.*] the mike.

FULFILLMENT. The segment of business operations dealing with fulfilling orders, as when listeners order cassettes, transcripts, or other premiums. A firm that specializes in this is called a FULFILLMENT HOUSE.

FUNCTION, DRAMATIC. The author's theatrical purpose in including a character, scene, or other element into a dramatic work.

## G

GAIN. Loudness, sonic volume.

quality that frequently occurs when recorded sound goes down another generation.

GENRE. A literary "species" or form, such as tragedy, sitcom, Western, soap, docudrama, etc.

FOLEY or FOLEY EFFECTS. (from Jack Foley, a film sound mixer) In broadcast drama and film, sound effects laid in live during mastering or overdubbing, and not prerecorded. A studio built for the production of such effects is a FOLEY STAGE, FOLEY ROOM, or (rarely) ADR room.

FOLEY WALKER. One who specializes in foley effects, so called because making footfall sounds is a principal responsibility.

FORESHADOW, FORESHADOWING. In a play or other literary work, it is often necessary to drop hints of a major happening or revelation, so that when it occurs it will not appear to come out of nowhere. This is called foreshadowing. It also helps build suspense and provide unity.

FRAMING DEVICE. A plot device to set off

GATE or NOISE GATE. A machine that reduces tape hiss, room tone, and other unwanted noise during transmission or recording by reducing or shutting off sound below a preset floor.

GATING. Employing a device that shuts off sound under a preset minimum and turns it on again when it exceeds the minimum. Used for noise reduction.

GENERATION. A recording considered in relation to its distance from the original live sound; the original recording of the live sound, the master, is the first generation; a dub of that recording, which may or may not include additional sounds, is the second generation; a dub of the dub is third generation, etc.

GENERATION LOSS. A degradation in

GENRE WRITING. Writing in a genre subject to highly prescribed structure, tone, atmosphere, style, dialogue and characterization.

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**GLOTTAL STOP** (or click). A transient sound caused by the sudden onset or offset of phonation [*q.v.*], as in the common American pronunciation of the word "button."

**GOBO**. *n.* (studio slang) a free-standing, usually portable, sound baffle [*q.v.*].

**GOTHIC**. *adj.* as applied to drama and literature, an atmosphere of foreboding, oppressive gloom, suspense and the other-worldly.

**GRAMS**. (BBC usage, short for "gramophone") 1) A script indication, usually in documentaries, that signifies the use of a prerecorded, often historical or vintage, sound byte, or bed; 2) recorded effects.

device for making the sound of footfalls on various surfaces, whether of gravel or another material.

## H

**HAMARTIA**. See **TRAGIC FLAW**.

**HASH** or **GROTZEL**. Unwanted random sounds, such as tape hiss, print-through, clicks from bad edits and punches, intrusive room tone, etc.

**HEAD/TAPE HEAD**. The magnetic device on a recorder that touches the tape and either records (**RECORD HEAD**) or reproduces (**PLAYBACK HEAD**) sound.

**HEAD, SYNC**. A head that plays back previously recorded sounds in synchronization to new sounds as they are being laid down on the same tape.

**HEADROOM**. *n.* The dynamic area between the median or average level of a of managing the house (*q.v.*) during a live performance, including supervising ushers, box office staff, concessionaires and custodial personnel; co-equal to and liaison with the stage manager (*q.v.*).

**HOUSE STAFF**. The resident personnel of a theater or auditorium who maintain the facility, man the box office, handle crowd control, operate and maintain equipment and supplies, etc.

**GRAMS OPERATOR**. (BBC) The studio technician in charge of laying down prerecorded music, sounds, and voices.

**GRAND GUIGNOL** (from Fr. Théâtre du grand guignol [Theatre of the Big Puppet] in Paris, a notorious hole-in-the-wall playhouse at the turn-of-the-century where such performances originated), sometimes simply **GUIGNOL** (pronounced geen-YOLE). *n. adj.* A theater movement or style characterized by excessive melodrama, violence, gore, and spectacle; hence, anything graphically shocking, violent, and gory.

**GRAVEL BOX, GRAVEL PIT**. A Foley

sound recording and the loudest undistorted sound possible.

**HISS**. *n.* see **NOISE**, **WHITE**.

**HIT ONE'S MARK**. See **MARK**.

**HOLD BOOK**. *v.i.* To read the script while talent [*q.v.*] performs and note errors, interpolations, transpositions that may necessitate retakes.

**HOT**. A microphone or track that has been turned on or receiving sound informations is said to be hot.

**HOT ON MIKE**. Intimate and very close to the microphone to take advantage of the proximity effect [*q.v.*], said of delivery.

**HOUSE**. *n.* 1) The portion of an auditorium in front of the stage, including the seating area, foyer and box office, hence, 2) the audience present in an auditorium during a live performance.

**HOUSE MANAGER**. The person in charge

**HOUSE**. 1) A "live" audience, i.e., an audience bodily present in the performance environment. "What a great house we had today" translates as "What a receptive and responsive audience we had today;" "nice house" = "large audience;" etc.; 2) the area of a performance space reserved for the audience, as distinguished from the stage, wings, and back stage.

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HUBRIS. (from Gr.: "pride") Excessive confidence, cosmic arrogance, overweening pride, usually the mistaken overestimate of one's capacity to control one's destiny or contend with God; often the one tragic flaw [q.v.] in an otherwise noble character.

## I

INDEPENDENT. A station neither owned nor affiliated with a network.

IN MEDIAS RES. (from Gr.: "in the middle of things") A plot device wherein the action begins close to the climax or at an exciting

INDEX. 1) *n.* An electronic signal that can be laid on a DAT or CD to mark the beginning of a take or passage to be played, so that in playback the DAT can be instantly cued to that point; hence 2) *v.* to mark a DAT with such a signal.

INDICATE. To play a quality as an actor superficially and without investment or sincerity, usually obviously so; to employ indication.

INDICATION. A conventionalized or broad physical or vocal gesture substituting for one that the audience could not perceive, such as a stage whisper; hence the affectation of emotion, display of all the outward signs of emotion with no inner truth; the going through the motions; in script writing, an instruction to the actor, director or engineer written into the script; a stage direction.

INFORMATION / INFORMATIONS. The code inscribed in a transmission substance (film emulsion, radio waves, electromagnetic energy) captured on or flowing through a medium (film, tape, air, cable) that

PROPERTY, INTELLECTUAL

INTERCUT. 1) *v.* To interrupt the recording of a scene because of a flub and then to resume recording from or just prior to the stopping point; 2) *n.* a correction thus made.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE. *n.* A soliloquy representing the unspoken thoughts of a character in a play; in radio often electronically set-off from normal dialogue.

point, flashes back to the beginning and then proceeds to the end.

INAMORATA. 1) the role of female love interest; 2) the actress playing or specializing in such roles; 3) the leading lady of a commedia dell'arte troupe.

INBOARD. *adj.* Built-in, as opposed to outboard, frequently used in relation to sound equipment.

is made from light and sound that can be transformed back into light and sound.

INGÉNUE. [ON-zhah-noo] 1) The conventional role of attractive, young female lead; 2) an actress playing or specializing in such roles.

IN POST. During post-production.

IN REPERTORY. *adv.* Said of an engagement, season, or set of performances of a star performer or performance ensemble, especially a theatrical one: in a revolving repertory of performance pieces or plays; broadcasts in repertory are rare in American radio, but not unheard of.

INT. *n.* script abbreviation for "interior."

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY. See

INTERLUDE. *n.* A conversation, skit, scene, musical number, often only tangentially related to the plot, that suspends the flow of dramatic action.

IPS. Inches per second, a standard unit of analogue [q.v.] recording and playback speed in America. Professional recordings are made no slower than 7-1/2 ips, and may

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be made at 15 ips, 30 ips, or faster, to increase sound quality.

IRONY. *n.* A literary device, and one particularly used in drama, in which what is stated contrasts or conflicts with what is wryly suggested.

ISBN. The International Standard Book number, used to accurately and swiftly identify books, audios, videos and software by publishers, stores, libraries, universities, wholesalers and distributors.

ISO BOOTH. (isolation booth), a small room, often adjacent to or within a larger

### K

KEEPER. (studio) *n.* A good take.

KUNSTKOPF. (Ger.: "art head") *n.* The head-shaped microphone assembly used in recording binaural audio.

### L

LAMPOON. 1) *n.* A light, good-humored satire; 2) *v.t.* to satirize light-heartedly.

LAVALIERE. *n.* A type of small, personal microphone that may be worn unobtrusively on the body.

LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS. In all types of performance and presentation, whether theatrical, literary, musical, sports-related, journalistic, or otherwise, the effect of boredom produced by duration on an audience; the longer a performance or presentation, the more the law of LEADING MAN or LEADING LADY. *n.* An actor who usually plays only the most important roles in dramatic productions; the actor playing the most important role in a specific production.

LEAK. *v.i.* to leak from one track [*q.v.*] or microphone to another; said of sounds.

LEAKAGE. *n.* Sound leaking into a microphone not intended to pick it up.

LEVEL. *n.* Sound volume.

LIBRETTO. *n.* The spoken portion of a musical play script; in opera, the entire text.

studio, for recording a sound in isolation from other sounds.

### J

JUMP or JUMP CUT. *n.* A sudden transition between scenes of a radio and teleplay, indicated in scripts by the phrases JUMP TO or CUT TO .

JUVENILE. *n.* See boy.

diminishing returns must be counteracted by ever more impressive effects or ever more absorbing content.

LAY DOWN. *v.t.* to record (something).

LAY IN. *v.t.* To overdub.

LAZZO, plural LAZZI. *n.* Recurring or running gag, skit, stage business or comic routine of the commedia dell'arte, hence any such business recurring or imbedded in various contexts and various works, such as the "Slowly I Turned" lazzo of Vaudeville.

LEAD. (Pronounced with long "e") *n.* The most or one of the most important actors or roles in a dramatic production; a principal role or player.

LEADER. 1) *n.* A length of non-recordable film, tape or paper that can be edited to analog recording tape or film to mark cues or protect the ends from damage; 2) *v.* to separate tracks with leader.

LIMIT. *v.* To use an electronic device to keep transmitted or recorded sounds below a preset threshold of volume.

LIMITER. *n.* An electronic device that limits sound — that is, keeps loud sounds beneath a preset ceiling of volume; similar to a compressor [*q.v.*].

LIMIT, PEAK. *v.*, to set an AGC [*q.v.*] so that it brings down the volume of only the "peaks," or loudest sounds, thus preventing distortion.

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LINE. *n.* A unit of dialogue equivalent to a phrase, sentence, or speech, depending upon the context in which the word is used.

LINES. *n.* Dialogue.

LITERATURE, DRAMATIC. *n.* The body of written drama, especially that which possesses literary merit as well as, or more than, theatrical merit; drama considered as a branch of literature.

environments.

LOOP, or TAPE LOOP. *n.* A tape that has been spliced into a loop so that the sound recorded on it can be extended indefinitely, usually to provide a bed for other sounds.

## M

MANNERISM, to be MANNERED. An actor's often repetitious affectation of performance, used to disguise fatigue, indifference, jitters, or a lack of real technique; in art and literature, any overused and stale stylistic device.

MARQUEE VALUE. The ability of the publicized name of a performer, author, director, composer, et al., to attract audiences to a production.

MARK. *n.* In film and television, a position on a set where an actor is to stand or is to move to, in order to be in the frame of the MELODRAMA. 1) Used pejoratively, an inflated, unctuous style of writing or performing; hammy performance; 2) a style of drama in which good and evil are personified in opposing characters, and often including sensational elements; 3) a theatrical form of the 18th Century in which spoken lines are heavily underscored by instrumental music, which evolved into a popular 19th century form, incorporating elements of definition 2 with songs or ballads, which heavily influenced grand opera and led to melodrama in the modern senses.

METAPHOR. The comparison of essentially unlike things, such as "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." (Shakespeare) When the things compared are joined by a

LIVE. [pronounced with long "i"] 1) *adj.* An acoustical environment possessing reverberation; 2) *adj. & adv.*, unrecorded, in real time, during performance, as "a live broadcast."

LOMBARD EFFECT. *n.* The adjustment of vocal loudness according to the level of auditory stimulation, particularly in noisy

camera; hence, in audio, the actor's mike position as spiked [*q.v.*] on the studio floor; TO HIT ONE'S MARK is to arrive at the mark after a cross [*q.v.*].

MASK or MASQUE. *n.* A character of the commedia dell'arte (e.g. Harlequin, Pierrot, Pantalone); hence any stereotyped comic character (e.g. Chaplin's Tramp, Mickey Mouse, Paul Rubens's Peewee Herman) whose name, personality, costume, and make-up recur in various otherwise disconnected theatrical works.

MASTER. 1) *n.* The raw first generation recording from which the overdub and mix is made; also VOICE MASTER, MUSIC MASTER, etc.; 2) *n.* the final mix or completely packaged program from which all copies are to be made; also BROADCAST MASTER, TRANSMISSION MASTER; 3) *v.* to record a master.

MEIOSIS. Rhetorical understatement.

connective, it is a SIMILE, as in "Life is like a sewer; you get out of it exactly what you put into it." (Tom Lehrer.) Sometimes the metaphor is submerged or implied, as in this 16th century lyric comparing love's absence to drought:

Western wind, when wilt thou blow,  
The small rain down can rain?  
Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again!

METONYMY. The substitution of the name for one thing for another that it closely relates to, as when speaking of someone's hand to mean someone's handwriting.

MIKE 1) *n.* microphone; 2) *v.t.* to use a microphone.



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MICROPHONE, BOOM. A microphone held at the end of a boom [*q.v.*].

MICROPHONE, SHOTGUN. A long thin microphone which is designed to reject all sounds except those directly in front of it.

MIS EN SCÈNE (Fr. literally "placement/setting in the theater."). 1) *n.* the staging or production design of a dramatic work, considering such factors as blocking, scenery, props, lighting, costuming, sound plot and direction of the actors as they form an artistic physical, optisonic, [*q.v.*] or sonic interpretation of the work; hence, 2) in cinema (and by extension in any form of theater), a director's, especially an auteur's, style, as manifested in a particular work, or in the director's collective oeuvre.

MIX. 1) *n.* a recording made from a master and sounds, music and voices blended together in final or near final form; 2) *n.* the process by which such a recording is made; 3) *v.* to combine prerecorded sound, music and voices into final or near final form.

MIXER. The engineer who handles post-production.

feasible to download quality audio from the Web very quickly and to load a great deal of sound information on a normal-sized compact disk.

MP4: (MPEG layer 4), A more recent audio compression format that is similar to mp3 in use, except that it is often used for more than two channels of audio. It is the format used for Dolby [*q.v.*] Digital surround sound on DVD disks.

MORPHEME. *n.* In grammar, the smallest unit of meaning; any word or part of a word that conveys meaning and cannot be further divided into smaller meaningful elements.

MS PATTERN. A stereophonic recording technique which uses two microphones. Unlike x-y [*q.v.*], the microphones are not identical and they must be physically as close to each other as possible.

MUTLIMEDIA. See OPTISONIC.

MULTITRACK. A method of mixing audio programs using three or more discrete

MIKE TECHNIQUE. the skill and methodology by which talent uses a microphone to advantage.

MIXING BOARD. See BOARD, MIXING.

MONO (monophonic sound). Sound originating from one sound source or speaker.

MOS. Man-on-the-street; when MOS occurs as a script indication, it means that the dialogue that follows comes from an interview with an ordinary citizen recorded in the field.

MOUNT. *v.t.* To produce or direct a theatrical event, as "to mount a production."

MP2: (MPEG layer 2), A commonly used digital picture compression format used for moving and still images. It is the format used for the visual elements on DVD disks.

MP3. (MPEG layer 3) An audio compression technology that compresses CD-quality sound by a factor of 12, while providing almost the same fidelity. MP3 has made it channels of sound that are mixed down to one or two.

MUSIC, BACKGROUND. Music that the characters supposedly do not hear and that the audience pretends not to hear, that seems to arise from ethereal musicians, and that reinforces the mood or atmosphere of a scene.

MUSIC, SOURCE. As distinguished from background music, music that supposedly originates in the environment of a scene and that the characters hear, as the band in a night club.

MUSIC, STOCK. Generic prerecorded music.

MUSIC, TITLE. The theme music or leitmotif for a program or series. MAIN TITLE: The theme music that opens a program, hence, the entire program opening; the billboard. CLOSING or END

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**TITLE:** The theme music that closes the program, hence, the entire program closing, outro.

**MUTE.** *v.t.* To turn off one or more tracks while recording, mixing or listening.

## N

**NAB.** The National Association of Broadcasters. An important professional trade organization, primarily serving commercial broadcasting industry.

**NAME.** A star; a well-known or prestigious performer, director, or producer whose participation will lend prestige, credibility, legitimacy, or audience appeal to a production.

**NARRATE.** To describe or tell at length, in drama especially of off-stage action.

**NARRATION.** Descriptive speeches, especially of off-stage action; any speech of a Chorus or narrator.

**NARRATIVE.** A story, tale.

**NOISE GATE.** See gate, noise.

**NOISE, PINK.** A defined spectrum of noise which, when its frequency contents are divided into musical octaves, contains equal energy in each octave. It is used to align electronic and acoustic playback devices. It sounds like a somewhat muffled white noise.

**NOISE, WHITE.** defined spectrum of noise which contains equal energy at each and every individual frequency. It is often called hiss.

**NPR.** National Public Radio, the radio equivalent of PBS, with which it is often confused by civilians.

## O

**O AND O or O & O.** A station owned and operated by a national network.

**OBJECTIVE.** *n.* The (often covert) aim of a character in a scene, the theory being that every character in every scene has some sort of objective that performers must

**NARRATIVE HOOK.** A plot device or any other stratagem that grabs the audience's attention at the beginning of a dramatic program.

**NATURALISM.** A style of writing and performance in which the situations are presented with convincing but selective verisimilitude.

**NEEDLE DROP.** A fee paid to the copyright owner or publisher every time a stock effect or piece of music is used in an audio production.

**NETWORK.** A regional or national organization offering subscribing stations and O and Os programs and other services.

**NOISE.** Unwanted sound, hash. Tracks are said to be noisy, not when they're loud, but when hash is intrusive.

recognize to make the scene work dramatically.

**OFF MIKE.** Away from the microphone, the audio equivalent of up stage. (See BACK)

**ON MIKE.** "Down stage" or at the ideal microphone position.

**OBLIGATORY SCENE.** See SCENE, OBLIGATORY.

**ONOMATOPOEIA.** A word or expression that sounds like the thing it describes, such as slush, pow, sizzle, thud.

**OPTISONIC.** *adj.* Pertaining to remote dramatic forms combining light and sound, such as film, video tape, optical disk and other technologies; multimedia. (my coinage).

**ORGANIC.** *adj.* 1) In playwrighting, arising

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intrinsically, as from the natural consequences of the characters, their situations and interactions, as opposed to a contrivance such as a *deus ex machina* [q.v.]; 2) in acting, employing one's own emotional equipment appropriately and spontaneously in performance, as opposed to "indication" [q.v.].

OUT or SOUND OUT. A script indication for an abrupt drop to zero volume.

OUTBOARD. *adj.* In electronics, external; as a device that can be wired to a tape recorder or console that enhances its performance.

OUTTAKE. A bad take or one not destined for use.

OVERDUB. 1) *v.* In multitracking [q.v.], to record sounds, music or voices on empty tracks of an already recorded tape in preparation for mixing; 2) *n.* the stage of the production process in which this is done.

neutral than PRI or NPR.

PACKAGE. 1) *v.* To add the wrap-arounds, credits, break announcements and previews to a final mix so that the program is ready to air; 2) *n.* a bundle of programs, or a bundle of services accompanying a program, offered to stations by a distributor, or to the distributor by a producer.

PACKAGING. The wrap-arounds, credits, break announcements, and previews that make a program ready to air and help make an audience receptive to the program.

PAGEANT. An elaborate celebratory or "occasional" (i.e., celebrating or marking a special event) kind of loosely constructed theatrical work, often essentially dramatic, emphasizing sentiment and spectacle, built around a central theme of great significance to the community at large.

PAGEENTRY. Spectacular display, magnificent theatricality.

PANDER TO AN AUDIENCE. To subvert artistic integrity by creating or altering a

PARODY. 1) *n.* a literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author

OVER-MODULATION. Sound distortion and/or signal break-up in a recording, playback or broadcast resulting from too much gain.

OVER-PRODUCE. *v.* to including too many sound elements to a mix [q.v.], thereby muddying focus and confusing the listener.

OXYMORON. An expression combining contradictions, as "thunderous silence" or "honest politician."

## P

PA or PRODUCTION ASSISTANT. The producer's and/or director's assistant in the studio; the radio equivalent to the stage manager.

PACIFICA. A small but influential public radio network and program syndicator, generally considered far less politically

literary work or performance opportunistically, thus lessening its artistic merit, to gain the approbation of an audience.

PAN. *v.t.* To move sound in stereo artificially.

PAN POT. See POT, PAN.

PANTS ROLE. A role in a dramatic work that requires a woman to impersonate a man.

PAPER THE HOUSE. To stack an audience of a live performance with friends, family, supporters, and others to make the house appear full or to ensure a warm audience reaction, or both.

PARADOX. A statement or situation that seems, but need not be, self-contradictory.

or a work for comic effect or ridicule; a travesty; 2) *v.t.* To make a parody of.

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PASS. *n.* One continuous pass of the recording tape over the record head of the tape recorder, during a session; a take.

PATCH. 1) *v.* To connect one piece of electronic equipment to another by some temporary device, so that they interact; 2) *n.* a connection so made.

PATCH BAY. A bank of receptors, usually on the console and resembling an old fashioned telephone switchboard, for patching.

PATCH, PHONE. A hook-up between a telephone line and a recording or broadcasting device so that sound information may be captured or broadcast directly from the line.

PATHOS. *n.* That which evokes sympathy, sorrow, or pity.

PERIPHRAISIS. *n.* The substitution of a descriptive phrase for the name of something, either because it expresses PHASE. When many mikes are hot and out of phase, or when equipment is miswired, stereo mixes could suffer from PHASE CANCELLATION, in which one or more tracks disappear.

PHASER or PHASE SHIFTER. A device for adjusting the phase of a sound in stereo to produce a desired effect.

PHASE SHIFT. The fraction of a complete cycle elapsed as measured from a specified reference point and expressed as an angle; out of phase; in an un-synchronized or un-correlated way.

PHASE CANCELLATION. The loss of sound frequencies caused when two identical signals, as a sound in stereo center recorded on two stereo channels are out of phase.

PHONATION. *n.* The production of sound by means of vocal cord vibration.

PHONEME. *n.* An individual sound unit of a spoken language, whose combination with other phonemes, in a particular order, produces morphemes [*q.v.*].

more than the name alone, or because expressive precision is for some reason impossible; as "wet roads" for sea, "tawny majesty" for lion, or "whatshisname, that writer with the beard who blew his brains out" for Hemingway.

PERSONIFICATION. *n.* The giving of human attributes to non-human things, as in expressions like "cruel sea," "howling gale," "blushing rose," "rosy-fingered dawn," etc.

PHASE. *n.* The synchronicity between two sound signals or electrical currents, especially the channels of a stereo mix, which, when exactly in sync, are said to be IN PHASE, and when not, OUT OF

PHYSICALITY. *n.* In audio drama, an element of palpable reality, such as touching, movement, gesture, etc. used by talent as a performance aid; the physical relationship with other characters, gesture, environment and movement that the talent can convey vocally, though standing still at the mike.

PICK UP. 1) *n.* a wild line or intercut; 2) *v.* a line or sequence of lines recorded wild; 3) *n.* directorial note given to actors between takes, run-throughs or performances.

PICK IT UP. A direction ordering talent to quicken the pace of delivery [*q.v.*].

PICK UP (or TIGHTEN) ONE'S CUES. to leave less pause between the beginning of one's line and the end of the previous line.

PIN. *v.i.* Said of the signal [*q.v.*], to be so load as to drive the needle of the V.U. [*q.v.*]

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meter all the way to the left; to be so loud as to cause distortion.

PINK NOISE. See NOISE, PINK.

PITCH. *n.* The pitch of a voice corresponds perceptually to the number of times per second the vocal folds come together during phonation [*q.v.*]. For example, a pitch corresponding to 250 Hz (near middle C on the piano) means that the vocal folds vibrate away from and then back toward each other 250 times per second (250 cycles per second).

PLAYER, SUPPORTING. An actor playing a secondary or tertiary role in a production.

PLOSIVE. *n.* A vocalization produced by the total stoppage and sudden release of breath, such as the initial sounds in the words *Pet*, *kite* and *tar*. Such sounds tend to "pop" [*q.v.*] the mike .

PLOT. 1) *n.* As opposed to story, the events of a fictional work arranged in order of ... the point of attack (is) almost immediately before the catastrophe and (tells) most of his story through exposition.

POP. 1) *v.* To make a popping sound by pronouncing a plosive or fricative too directly into a microphone; 2) *n.* a sound so made.

POP FILTER/WIND SCREEN. A device fitting over the microphone to reduce unwanted sounds from pops, exhalations, and the flow of air in a recording environment.

PORTMANTEAU WORD. A word derived from fragments of other words to express a combined meaning; for instance, "grumble," to complain under one's breath, combines "gripe" and "mumble."

P.O.V. Point of view, the desired illusion of physical audience orientation towards a scene or scene fragment, as when all sounds are heard from a specific character's POV.

the quality in a performer of looking or sounding as if he or she belongs on a stage, or sounds as if he or she belongs in front of a mike ; presence comes from confidence, technique and indefinable intuitive factors;

presentation; 2) *v.* to arrange a story into a plot.

PLOT POINT. A bit of information that must register with the audience before it can understand why the dramatic action is moving in certain directions.

POETIC JUSTICE. The doctrine that fictional characters should receive their just deserts in a fitting way, that by the end of the work, evil should be punished and virtue rewarded.

POINT OF ATTACK. The point in a story at which the playwright begins the action. The point of attack does not necessarily coincide with the beginning of the story. Easy changes of scene permit a playwright to present most of the story directly; in *Macbeth*, for example, the point of attack is near the beginning of the story, but in such modern plays, such as Ibsen's *Ghosts*,

POST-PRODUCTION or POST. *n.* All studio work done on a program after the taping of voices or music: editing, overdubbing, mixing.

POT. *n.* A fader [*q.v.*], usually used to denote old-style rotary fader.

POT, PAN. *n.* A rotary device on a mixing console for adjusting stereo, which can be rotated to "pan" a sound right and left.

PRINCIPAL. *n.* One of the lead actors or roles in a dramatic production.

PRE-MIX. 1) *v.* To mix part of the sounds of a scene or production before mixing all of them or before the voice session; 2) *n.* a partial sound mix.

PREPARATION. *n.* Information that has to be planted in advance of an action in order to make it believable. Also called PRIMING or THE SET-UP.

PRESENCE. *n.* 1) Stage or mike presence, (studio) overtones on sounds, 2) the audible flow of air and ambient noise picked up by a mike or mikes and peculiar to the sonic environment; also called ROOM TONE.

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PRIME. *v.* To prepare an audience for an action or an effect, by planting information or employing other preparatory stylistic elements in advance of the action or effect.

PRINT-THROUGH. An unwanted echo of sound recorded on a reel of analogue tape, caused by saturated layers printing through to adjacent layers wound above and below it.

PROBLEM PLAY. *n.* A play written to examine a moral, societal, or political problem.

PRODUCER. *n.* A job title with many definitions, from a kind of glorified flunky to the big boss or creative agent employed on a program or production. In theater outside the United States, the producer is what we

PROMO. *n.* A spot announcement advertising the program.

PROP. *n.* any noise maker (excluding body parts and shoes) during Foley [*q.v.*] recording.

PROPERTY. *n.* 1) A script, or literary work used as the basis for a script, considered as a production commodity; 2) in theater, any object picked up and handled by actors on stage during a performance, often abbreviated to "prop."

PROPERTY, INTELLECTUAL *n.* A product of imagination — such as a novel, play, recording, painting, invention — capable of some sort of physical embodiment.

PROTAGONIST. *n.* The main character of a play; the hero.

PROXIMITY EFFECT. The "warming" or mellowing of a sound from enhancement of low frequencies, produced when the source moves close to the microphone.

## Q

QUAD. Short for quadraphonic; four-channel stereo requiring two front and two back speakers.

QUAD, MATRIXED. Three-channel stereo, required when broadcasting quad under certain conditions, using two front channels

call the director. In audio drama, the executive who oversees all production activity and personnel, and who has the creative and managerial responsibility for the final production.

PRODUCER, EXECUTIVE. *n.* The executive who supervises the producer and who has all administrative and fiscal (sometimes also marketing, promotion and distribution) responsibility for a production.

PRODUCTION, APHONIC. *n.* Aphonic vocal production means that there is no phonation (no vibration of the vocal folds), as in voiceless whisper or severe laryngitis that prevents vocal fold vibration.

PSA. Public service announcement; a commercial for a non-profit organization or a charitable cause.

PUBLIC DOMAIN. A concept in copyright law concerning the expiration of copyright and other intellectual property protections (e.g. patents, trade marks). A work is protected only for a limited time, after which it "falls into the public domain," or becomes the common property of the human race.

PUMPING. *n.* An undesirable distortion of sound caused by too much compression [*q.v.*].

PUNCH. 1) *v.* To make an edit or to overdub a sound by turning on the record button as the moving tape passes the record head (also punch in); 2) *n.* an edit so made; in theater: 3) *v.* to emphasize a word, line or sound; 4) *n.* emphasis of a word, line or sound.

and one rear channel matrixed to give a quadraphonic effect.

QUALITY or VOICE QUALITY. The quality of the sounds we hear is determined by the sound made at the larynx, the filtering of the sound by the vocal tract (the airway above the larynx), and the reception and processing of the sound by the ear and brain. Breathy voice quality suggests that a

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relatively large amount of air is used during phonation [*q.v.*]. Some of the air is not modulated by the vibrating vocal folds, but comes through the glottis as turbulent flow converted to noise. Usually when there is breathy phonation, the glottis does not fully close during vocal fold vibration.

## R

RADIO, COMMERCIAL. The system of stations financed primarily by the sale of advertising time.

RADIO, UNIVERSITY. The system of non-commercial stations, usually not CPB qualified, operated at low power by universities primarily to serve the university community and to train or provide recreation for student volunteers. Many American colleges have their own 50-watt stations.

READ-THROUGH [*n.*] READ THROUGH [*v.*] 1) *n.* a run-through in which the cast reads a play aloud without movement or interruption from the director; table work; 2) *v.* to hold or participate in a read-through.

REALISM. A type of political expressionism [*q.v.*] originating in Germany after World War I; the theatrical and literary equivalent to the editorial cartoon.

RECAP. 1) *n.* (recapitulation) a summary of the action that has transpired thus far in the dramatic work, as at the beginning of serial episodes or as appears when necessary to reinforce plot points; 2) *v.* to make such a summary, to recapitulate.

presenting a season of performance in which an ensemble of performers is engaged to appear in works alternating throughout the performance year.

REPERTORY COMPANY or REPERTORY ENSEMBLE. A theater troupe consisting of actors engaged for the season, presenting works in repertory; used somewhat improperly, a theater troupe presenting regular seasons of works, whether sequentially or alternating, whether with an ensemble engaged for the season or performers engaged per production.

RADIO, COMMUNITY. The system of non-commercial broadcasters, many of them public radio stations, emphasizing volunteer, inclusive, community participation in station operations.

RADIO, PUBLIC. The system of non-commercial stations operating nominally in the community interest, under qualifications set by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

RADIO, SATELLITE. See SATELLITE RADIO.

RECORDIST. The recording engineer; the engineer operating the console during mastering.

REGISTER. *n.* Perceptually distinct region of vocal quality as pitch or loudness is changed; speaking registers are commonly differentiated as (from low to high) pulse, modal and falsetto.

REMOTE. *n.* a television or radio session held "in the field," that is, outside of the studio; a production or part of a production so made; *adj.* pertaining to field production;

REPERTOIRE. See repertory.

REPERTORY. *n.* the works represented in a season of performance, REPERTOIRE; the technique or bag of tricks, considered critically, at the command of a performer, ensemble or artist: technique; a method of

REPRESENTATIONALISM. Playwrighting and theatrical presentation in which action is presented on a bare or austere stage and in which much of the action and locale are suggested by the lines are said to be "representational." Examples include Greek tragedy and Elizabethan plays.

RESONANCE. *n.* 1) the intensification and enrichment of voiced sounds by supplementary vibration of the resonating chambers of the throat, mouth and nasal cavities that intensifies and enriches the tone; hence, 2) the emotional or intellectual

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intensification and enrichment of a sound, sight or writing that excites thoughts of other significant sounds, sights or writings.

REVERB. Reverberation; a sonic overtone purposely introduced to give the impression of some kind of live indoor environment, as a cave, auditorium, hallway, etc. See also ECHO.

in using language effectively and persuasively; 3) a style of speaking or writing, especially the language of a particular subject; 4) Language that is elaborate, pretentious, insincere, or intellectually vacuous.

RIDE GAIN. To manually control the volume during recording or mixing.

RING OUT. See decay.

ROLE, SUPPORTING. A secondary character in a dramatic work.

ROMANCE: A literary work or play appealing to a sense of adventure, often episodic and melodramatic, taking place on a vast terrain and emphasizing thrilling incidents and romantic love; a literary work or play, about the love lives of appealing principal characters, and celebrating the importance of romantic love.

ROOM TONE. See PRESENCE.

RUN-THROUGH [*n.*] or RUN THROUGH [*v.*]. 1) *n.* the uninterrupted rehearsal of an extended portion of a script or the entire sampled or converted into digital data.

SATELLITE RADIO. The audio equivalent of satellite television; at the beginning of the 21st century, only two satellite licensees are developing technology and programming.

SATIRE. A type of comedy, low or high, that ridicules aspects of human behavior, the purpose of which is to arouse contempt for the object.

SATURATE. To raise the sound levels during recording above the highest point that the recording medium can tolerate, incurring resultant distortion and possibly print-through [*q.v.*].

REVERSAL. (also puerility) See TURNING POINT.

RF. Radio frequencies; the often unwanted reception of broadcast signals on recording or playback equipment.

RHETORIC. 1) The art or study of using language effectively and persuasively; a treatise or book discussing this art; 2) Skill script; 2) *v.* to rehearse an extended portion of or the entire script without interruption.

RUN-THROUGH, FINAL: *n.* In audio drama, the last rehearsal, especially of a work to be recorded or broadcast before a studio audience, held as if it were an actual performance; the radio equivalent of a dress rehearsal.

## S

SAFETY COPY or SAFETY. A good quality copy of the final mix or packaged program kept in case something happens to the master.

SAMPLER. A digital gizmo for digitizing, archiving, adjusting and playing sound files.

SAMPLING FREQUENCY or SAMPLING RATE. The rate at which an analog signal is

SATURATION. Distortion of sound on a recording medium due to high sonic volume.

SCALE. *n.* Minimum payment for work tolerated by a union per the applicable union-management agreement.

SCENARIO. A narrative outline of a plot; see also treatment, bible.

SCENE. A dramatic unit in which all action is continuous and ensues in one location; by extension, continuous action within a scene in the first sense, unified by mood, participating characters or spine, etc. useful as rehearsal units; the locale or setting of a unit of action.



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- SCENE-À-FAIRE.** See **SCENE**, play into French scenes for rehearsal or taping purposes.
- SCENE, FRENCH.** A unit of continuous dramatic action delimited by the entrance or exit of one or more characters; for logistical reasons, the director sometimes divides a balance, completeness, poetic justice, etc. though not essential to the plot, as when the fate of a character the audience has taken an interest in is shown after the character has stopped playing an important role in the action.
- SCHMALTZ.** *n.* (Yiddish: "chicken fat") Lugubrious and insincere sentimentality; 'laying it on thick.'
- SCRUB.** *v.* In conventional audio editing, the tape is sometimes rocked back and forth over the playback head to find the exact editing point; scrubbing is the digital equivalent.
- SHTICK.** Excessive, hammy, stereotyped mannerism, or an actor's overused bag of tricks, especially when used for low humor or to pander to an audience; not always a pejorative term.
- SECOND.** *n.* An apprentice or assistant engineer in a commercial sound studio; often merely a gofer.
- SEGUE.** 1) *n.* A smooth or gradual transition from one sound to another or one scene to such as continuing characters, theme, format, setting, continuing plot line, etc.
- SESSION.** A continuous period of work on one project in a sound studio.
- SFX.** Sound effects.
- SHEET, CALL.** A rehearsal schedule.
- SHEET, CONTACT.** A list of key personnel with their contact information, distributed to the cast and crew at the beginning of production work.
- SHEET, CUE.** A fact sheet or tape box label showing the cues in and out, the duration, playback speed, and other essential playback information.
- SHEET, TRACK.** A list in order of the takes on a recording, also showing the tracks of multi-track tape that sounds have been recorded to, often with other notes useful in post-production.
- SCENE, OBLIGATORY.** The climactic scene in a well-made play in which all the threads of the plot are unsnarled; a scene necessitated by audience expectations, another without pause; 2) *v.* to make such a transition.
- SEMANTICS.** The relationship between words or symbols and their intended meanings. Semantic rules apply to spoken and written languages as well as programming languages.
- SEQUENCE.** *n.* As opposed to a scene, a montage consisting of narration, snatches of dialogue, sound bytes, etc. that summarizes events or presents them in quick succession.
- SERIAL.** A regularly scheduled continuing series that presents a story over many programs in a series, or installments in a periodical.
- SERIES.** A regularly scheduled program, the episodes of which share a unifying element,
- SHOCK MOUNT.** 1) *n.* A device fitted between a mike and its stand to prevent unwanted sound produced by vibrations from the studio floor; 2) *v.* to rig a microphone in such a way.
- SHOTGUN MICROPHONE.** See **MICROPHONE, SHOTGUN.**
- SIDES.** (always plural) A special script containing only one character's lines with cues in and out; hence, any script fragment prepared for use by talent during auditions or production.
- SIGHT LINES.** Theater parlance for the lines of unobstructed view between the audience

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and the objects or persons on stage. Even audio drama must pay attention to good sight lines when being performed before a studio audience.

**SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO.** see **SIGNAL**.

**SIGNATURE.** A musical theme used to identify a series or production entity.

**SIMILE.** See metaphor.

**SITCOM.** A type of broadcast comedy series employing farcical situations and recurring lead characters in self-contained episodes.

**SITUATION COMEDY.** See **Comedy, Situation**.

**SLAP.** Sound reverberating from the walls, floor, and ceiling of a studio.

**SLAPSTICK.** A stick used on stage to inflict harmless blows that make loud noise, hence a type of broad comedy relying upon exaggerated physical assault for its humor.

**SLATE.** *v.* To record an announcement of the take information, such as the take number, in front of the take as a kind of audio label; *n.* the audio label so recorded.

**SLATE TONE.** See tone, slate.

**SLOW-WIND** *v.t.* To wind or spool analog tape at playback speed for storage to one time such programs were sponsored by soap companies; any dramatic work resembling a soap opera in tone.

**SOLILOQUY.** *n.* A speech, usually extended, representing the inner thoughts of a character, spoken while the character is alone or believes him/herself to be alone in the scene.

**SOLO.** *v.* to turn off all but one track while recording or playing back a multi-track sound production.

**SOUNDSCAPE.** The environment for dramatic action created on the audio stage by descriptive dialogue and sonic effects; the audio equivalent to effects produced in the theater by sets, props and lighting; (audio art) a work for listening that manipulates and orders sound to create a mood or conjure the impression of an

**SIGNAL.** The sound source; wanted sound, as in the expression "signal to noise ratio," the ratio between wanted and unwanted noise being tracked.

prevent print-through, stretching and other damage. Slow-winding is a very even unstressful wind, which places a thin air cushion between layers of wound tape. The most common and practical method is simply to store tape tails out after play, without rewinding it.

**SMPTE** [Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers] **CODE.** An electronic code that can be laid on digital or analog tape for the purpose of synchronizing two sound recordings, or more commonly, synchronizing audio to video.

**SNEAK.** To fade a sound up or down so slowly that its appearance or disappearance is barely noticeable.

**SOAP or SOAP OPERA.** A broadcast serial, presenting by and large domestic situations in melodramatic terms, so called because at

environment; the audio equivalent of landscape painting.

**SOURCE MUSIC.** See music, source.

**SPEC.** *n.* (industry slang) speculation. To work "on spec" is to perform a job on the promise that it may provide a financial reward if certain conditions are met, but that the reward is by no means certain. A "spec script" is one that the writer composes without pay on the hope that someone will buy it.

**SPINE.** *n.* In drama, the essential unifying element or conjoined elements of a character, a scene or an entire play.

**SPIKE.** 1) *v.* to fix a position on stage or before the mike exactly by marking the floor with tape, chalk, etc.; 2) (electronics) *n.* an unwanted sudden surge of power through

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the circuitry of electronic equipment that can sometimes cause technical aberrations and system crashes.

character. See THROUGH-LINE.

SPLICE 1) *v.* To edit tape by physically cutting and joining; 2) *n.* the juncture of two pieces of tape edited together.

SPOT. 1) *v.* To locate and mark the most desirable position for performing, so as to be in the optimal view of the camera or range of the microphone; 2) *n.* short for spot announcement.

SPOT ANNOUNCEMENT. A broadcast advertising or public service message between 10 to 120 seconds long; a commercial.

SPOT CHECK. A check of the exposed recording tape for flaws made by playing only brief passages at various points on the tape.

SQUAWK or SQUAWK BOX. See TALKBACK.

STAGE. 1) *n.* Literally or figuratively, the "place" of theatrical action; in a playhouse the stage is a physical space in an auditorium in view of the audience, shared by the sets, props, and actors; in radio it is the space between the speakers in the to heighten suspense.

STAGE WHISPER. *n.* A method by which an actor gives the impression of whispering while speaking loudly enough to be heard throughout the house [*q.v.*]; a whisper that the whisperer wishes to be overheard.

STAGE, GIVE. *v.* In acting, to yield the spotlight, to help focus the audience's attention away from oneself to another actor, as by pointing one's body toward the actor, facing away from the audience or moving out of the light, etc.

STAGE, TAKE. *v.* In acting, to command the spotlight, to draw the audience's attention to oneself, as by standing at the most prominent stage position, by raising one's voice, by moving when other performers are still, etc.

SPINE. An underlying motivational or structural unity of a scene, play, or

audience's listening environment; 2) *v.t.* to turn a literary property into a performance piece; 3) to produce and/or direct something; to mount a theatrical production.

STAGE MANAGER. (theater) The person in charge of all matters on or back stage in a theater or auditorium. Though usually employed by the producer rather than the performance facility, he is co-equal to and liaises with the house manager (*q.v.*). The stage manager supervises lighting crew, sound crew, custodians and stage hands, often cuing them and the actors during performances. He or she may even conduct refresher rehearsals between performances.

STAGE WAIT. *n.* (drama) A pause intended

STAGE WAIT. *n.* A brief pause in action or dialogue in a play introduced to build suspense.

STATION BREAK. A pause in a syndicated or network broadcast program that allows local stations to identify themselves and deliver advertising and other messages.

STEP ON A LINE or LAUGH. In acting, to begin a line too quickly, so as to spoil the previous line.

STEREO or STEREOPHONIC SOUND. In audio, the impression or illusion of lateral position (as opposed to depth) of a signal or signals by balancing two audio tracks and channeling them through two sets of speakers positioned to the left and right of the listener or through stereo earphones.

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STING. *n.* A short, sharp musical chord or chord series used for dramatic punctuation.

STOCK MUSIC. See MUSIC, STOCK.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS. See INTERIOR MONOLOGUE.

STRUCTURE, COMIC. A plot structure in which everything tends to go badly for the protagonist until the climax, after which his or her fortunes improve.

STRUCTURE, TRAGIC. A plot structure in which everything goes well for the protagonist until the climax, after which everything goes badly.

STUDIO. 1) The place where programs are recorded or performed for broadcast; more specifically 2) the room in a production facility containing the talent, musicians and/or foley operators, as opposed to the booth or control room.

STUDIO MANAGER. (BBC usage) the chief engineer on a session who coordinates the efforts of the GRAMS and foley operators, and who operates the console; the recordist [*q.v.*].

SURROUND SOUND. *n.* the technical system for recording and reproducing stereophonic sound with more than two speakers. The stereo effect is more reliable than that of conventional two channel. For home entertainment systems, the most popular form of surround sound is called 5.1. It uses three front speakers, two behind, and a bass speaker (sub-woofer).

SUSPENSE. Uncertainty coupled with anxiety; apprehension causing a tense expectancy in the audience.

SWEETEN. *v.* to add sound elements for listening enhancement/story clarification.

SWEET SPOT. *n.* the listening space between two speakers where the stereo can best be distinguished — the audio equivalent to the theatrical "Duke's chair," the most advantageous seat in the playhouse to view and hear the action on stage.

SYMBOL. Something employed to stand for something else, often a simple or mundane

STORY. As opposed to plot, the chronological sequence of events in a literary work.

STYLE. The sum of elements — diction, vocal and physical gesture, tempo, ornamentation, etc. — appropriate for the writing, performance or production of a performance work; the characteristic techniques, themes and artistry of a particular author, performer, director or producer of an artistic work; panache, flair, the pleasing and distinctive affect of personality, charm, and audacity.

SUBPLOT. A subsidiary plot woven into the fabric of, subsidiary to, and often amplifying the main plot.

SUBTEXT. The covert, implicit or psychological meaning of an utterance, which may be more than, or the opposite of, the overt or apparent meaning.

SUPPORT. *n.* a supporting player [*q.v.*].

SURREALISM. A style of writing and performance depicting unconscious and subjective realities.

object representing a complex idea, psychological or emotional state, or taboo.

SYNDICATOR. An independent distributor of broadcast programs.

SYNDICATION. A method of delivering programs through a syndicator, or independent distributor.

SYNECDOCHE. *n.* In discourse, the substitution of a part of something for the whole and vice versa; as when "stage" is used to mean "theater."

SYSTEMS CUE. See cue, systems.

SYNTAX. In the study of grammar, the structural or grammatical rules that define how symbols in a language are to be combined to form words, phrases, expressions, and other allowable constructs.

## T

TABLE WORK. *n.* Rehearsals in which the play is read without movement, often with

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the actors sitting around a table, in which interpretation; hence in radio, rehearsals held away from the mikes or outside the studio, for the same purpose.

TAFT-HARTLEY. (labor law) As used in talent-producer relations, The Taft-Hartley or Labor-Management Relations act of 1947, as amended in 1951 – contract provisions allowed or mandated by The Taft-Hartley Act regarding non-union talent working under AFTRA auspices. Non-union talent may be hired on a union job provided the talent agrees to join AFTRA within 30 days of the job. Talent that becomes subject to this provision is said to be TAFT-HARTLEYED, that is, to be forbidden to work in a union shop after the 30-day period unless s/he has joined AFTRA.

TAKE. 1) *n.* One of possibly several versions recorded of the same fragment of a work, from which the most satisfactory will be chosen for the final program; 2) *v.* to record a take; 3) *n.* a physical or vocal reaction usually broad and registering surprise, as in the phrase "to do a take."

structure and is often essential to keep a work of any length interesting and meaningful.

TEST TONES. See, tones, test.

THEATER. As opposed to drama, broadly speaking, the field of performance art concerned with acting out a story through dance, mime, speech, oral narrative, song, or a mixture of these things, coupled with special effects, costume, scenery, lighting, etc.; and thus encompassing the genres of drama, ballet, opera, pantomime, masque, performance art, story telling, etc.; (also THEATRICALITY) the non-literary aspects of performance, especially those contributing to sensation and spectacle; a building dedicated to performance, or figuratively in audio drama, the mind of the listener; a company or ensemble specializing in theatrical performance, as the Dance Theater of Harlem, Molière's Comédie française, or Welles' Mercury Theater of the Air.

the focus is on characterization and TALENT. In audio drama and voice-over work, an actor of actors. Always singular.

TALKBACK. *n.* Also called "squawk" or squawkbox," the device in a sound studio that enables the control room to communicate with recording area.

TAIL OUT or TAILS OUT. *adv.* [Said of exposed analogue recording tape] Spooled or wound on a core or reel so that the beginning of the program is closest to the core or reel. See slow wind.

TAPE HEAD. See head.

TAPE HISS. A kind of unwanted noise heard to a greater or lesser degree on all magnetic analog recording tape.

TEASER. An element at the beginning of a program enticing the listener to stay tuned, usually a preview or excerpt; a narrative hook.

TENSION. The basic element of most music, literature, and drama in the Western World; the introduction, intensification, suspension, and relief of which provides

THEATER OF THE ABSURD. A misnomer (appropriately enough, perpetrated by Martin Esslin, former head of BBC radio drama) for various forms of symbolic, emblematic, expressionistic drama usually on existential themes that had a vogue after World War II, typified by the early works of Edward Albee, Samuel Becket, Eugene Ionesco and Fernando Arrabal.

THEORY, DRAMATIC. A field of study that describes the elements of drama and includes the development and application of methods for analyzing and creating dramatic works, and the interrelationship between playwrighting and performance practice.

THROUGH-LINE. The unifying element — thematic, motivational, or otherwise — of a scene, sequence, act or entire play; often used synonymously with spine.

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**TIGHTEN CUES.** To reduce the gap between the end of one sound, musical passage, or line and the beginning of a following sound, musical passage, or line.

**TIMBRE** [pronounced TAHM-bur] or **TONE**. *n.* The attributes of a sound that distinguishes it from other sounds of the same pitch and volume. The distinctive tone of a musical instrument or a voice.

**TITLE** or **TITLE MUSIC**. See music, title.

**TONE**. 1) The playwright's attitude, as the audience infers it, in his work; 2) timbre [*q.v.*].

**TONE, ROOM**. See **PRESENCE**.

**TONE, SLATE**. A low pitched tone recorded as a bed under the slate, which, when the tape is fast wound over the playback head, is heard as a beep; used to facilitate the editing of analogue tape.

**TONES, CALIBRATION**. White noise that tests and allows for adjustments to a recording or playback device's calibrations.

**TRACK SHEET**. See **SHEET**, **TRACK**.

**TRAGEDY**. (Gr., "goat song") The ancient quasi-religious, highly conventionalized drama of ancient Greece; the Western verse drama arising from Greek and medieval scholastic drama, written partially or completely in verse and predominantly serious in tone, in which the protagonist suffers a grave material loss or death at the end, hence; in contemporary terms, a dramatic form in which antagonistic forces compel a protagonist to confront his/her moral worth, and in choosing the moral over the materially advantageous choice is enlightened and ennobled, though outwardly suffering a grievous loss; or any play dealing with profound themes and employing tragic structure.

**TRAGIC FLAW**. (also *hamartia*) A shortcoming or weakness in an otherwise admirable character that contributes to his or her ruin; in Greek tragedy, this was often *hubris* [*q.v.*].

**TONES, TEST**. Tones recorded at the beginning of a tape before the program, by which the playback engineer sets the playback level, and checks phasing and alignment.

**TOP**. 1) *v.* in acting, to begin a line before the previous speaker has finished and at a louder volume; to clip; 2) to produce something in time more interesting or impressive than that which came before.

**TRACK**. 1) *v.* To transmit sound electronically, to record; 2) *n.* one of the horizontal divisions of recording tape into discrete channels for multitrack recording; *n.* a recording.

**TRACK, PRESENCE**. An audio track devoted to artificial or actual room tone, ambience or pink noise, used to heighten a sense of reality and camouflage edits within a scene.

**TRAGICOMEDY**. A play with many humorous moments, but tragic overall.

**TRAVESTY**. See **PARODY**.

**TREATMENT**. A narrative outline of a dramatic work for cinema or broadcast. See **BIBLE**.

**TROD THE BOARDS**. (theater slang) To act professionally; to be a professional actor.

**TROPE**. Any figure of speech.

**TURN**. *n.* 1) A variety act (e.g. knife throwing, magic act, comedy team), specialty, skit, routine or lazzo. A well-known skit or skit worthy of a great performer is a **STAR TURN**, hence, 2) a term used sarcastically for a temper tantrum and over-acting.

**TURNING POINT** (also **REVERSAL**, **PERIPETY**). The point in the dramatic

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action on or near the climax in which the fortunes of the protagonist turn from bad to good or good to bad.

TWEAK. To make refining adjustments and improvements.

TOP

## U

UNCOVER, *v.* To position yourself on stage so that the audience has a good view of you; see COVER.

UNIONS or GUILDS. Professional American audio drama often, but not always, falls within the jurisdictions of AFTRA, AFM, the Writers Guild, and sometimes NABET or other technicians' union.

UNWIRED NETWORK. An independent program service, or syndicator, and the stations carrying its program(s).

UP FULL. To fade a sound up quickly to the maximum desired level.

UPSTAGE. 1) *n.* Away from the audience, towards the back of the stage, the opposite system of tissue layers in the larynx that can vibrate to produce sound.

VOCAL FRY. Phonation [*q.v.*] at very low frequencies. Generally vocal fry sounds like a rapid series of taps. Overuse of loud vocal fry may be related to vocal problems.

VOICE OVER. *n.* 1) in TV and film, an unseen voice added to the sound track in post; in radio, narration for a spot announcement; 2) in radio drama, narration heard over music, sound or, especially, dialogue.

VOLUME. *n.* Loudness. In the actors' vocal production [*q.v.*], loudness of the voice depends on how close the vocal folds are to each other, how much air pressure there is type of play seen especially in England, France and the United States from 1825 to the present in which tight construction and careful, logical plotting are emphasized. Examples include Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camellias*, Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* and especially the plays of Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou.

of downstage; 2) *v.* to displace action; to draw inappropriate attention to oneself at the expense of another performer or of the focus of the scene, originally by standing upstage of other players so that they have to turn their backs to the audience to maintain eye contact.

## V

VARISPEED. Short for variable speed; 1) *n.* An analogue mechanism on a recorder that alters the speed of tape in order to alter the sound recorded on it; 2) *v.* to alter a sound using such a device.

VERISMO. (cinema) A style of drama or literature characterized by gritty, earthy fidelity to real life; also called verism.

VOCAL FOLDS (vocal chords). A paired

below the larynx, the fundamental frequency of the voice, and the resonance structure of the vocal tract. Loudness of the voice will generally increase when the air pressure in the lungs increases.

VU. Short for volume unit, a sound measurement unit used in recording studios.

## W

WALLA. 1) Crowd noise; 2) talent specializing in crowd noise.

WELL-MADE PLAY. (*pièce bien faite*) A

WHITE NOISE. See NOISE, WHITE.

WILD. *adj., adv.* Performed or recorded out of sequence and/or isolated from the rest of the scene, sequence or script.

WILD TRACK. 1) *v.* To record a portion of script out-of-sequence, and in isolation,

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usually to correct an error; 2) *n.* a recording thus made, a pick up [*q.v.*].

WIND SCREEN. See POP FILTER.

WRAP-AROUNDS. Opening and closing packaging [*q.v.*] for a program.

WRITERS GUILD. The union representing writers, especially in television, cinema, and commercial radio.

## X

X-Y or X-Y PATTERN. A method of taping in stereo using two mikes with overlapping patterns.



## Professionalism and Studio Etiquette

Co-workers have every right to demand professionalism of each other. Professionalism means competence and basic familiarity with repertory, technique and trade jargon. It also means attitude: a spirit of courtesy, generosity and cooperation. The surest way to subvert quality and ruin everyone else's pleasure in the process is to display a bad attitude. The surest way to invite co-workers to do their best and feel invigorated by the process is to act like a professional, expect professionalism of your co-workers, and give them the respect due professionals.

Over the centuries, theater has acquired a traditional working etiquette, based on common sense. You don't, for instance, walk or stand between the actors and the director during rehearsal. Unfortunately, the rules are often observed only in the breach. In my experience, good actors generally behave well. Bad behavior most frequently comes from abusive directors and mediocre stage managers. If actors pull stunts, it is usually because they are fatigued and under stress, or have lost respect for the director. Yet, so important is professional decorum to the success of the process, and so great the tension between it and the personalities involved, that standards of production etiquette are often written into professional contracts.

Radio has no such rules. Even in commercial radio, abuses abound, as any actor knows who has worked voice-over auditions, which are routinely abusive to talent. In public radio, the standards of professionalism strike outsiders as appallingly low. Defensiveness, self-pampering, touchiness, insularity, intellectual sloth, snobbery, and dilettantism are rife among radio people. I suspect that, since most audio drama in America today is produced either by public radio hands or the equivalent of community theater troupes, there is more acting out than acting. It is apparently not understood that civility and responsibility are as essential to the success of the production process as knowledge, talent, and experience.

The most common and aggravating breach of professionalism in subordinates is second-guessing the person in charge. This means unilaterally modifying instructions to suit the subordinate's convenience, a very different thing from modifying instructions to deal with unforeseen circumstances. The latter is often necessary, the former inexcusable.

The most common and aggravating breach of professionalism in supervisors is self-indulgence. This includes coming unprepared, tardiness, sexual harassment, mocking subordinates, and forcing the crew to become a captive audience. Any self-indulgence at the expense of coworkers or of the artistic product is a power trip and has no place in a professional or community operation.

Let me here suggest some guiding rules of professional etiquette for you and your collaborators:

- Do your best.
- Come prepared; do your homework.
- Leave your personal problems at home.
- Arrive promptly, begin at the appointed time.
- Don't ask your co-workers directly or indirectly for positive reinforcement.
- Excuses waste time. Make excuses only when you are unable to proceed with work and must explain why in order to obtain help.

### The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

- Personal or deprecating remarks, condescension, showing off, tantrums, intoxicants, sexual harassment, and all other forms of abusiveness and self-indulgence are taboo.
- A spirit of cooperation, civility, and courtesy is universally observed.
- During voice sessions, the director is boss; in all other sessions, the producer is. Theater is not a democracy.
- When the engineer calls for silence, everyone shuts up immediately.
- Only the director directs the actors; only the conductor conducts musicians; only the producer oversees the engineers. Anyone else addresses suggestions privately to the director, conductor, or producer to pass on at an opportune time. If it is clear that suggestions are not welcome, shut up.
- When the producer or director begins speaking, everyone else in the room is quiet and attentive.
- When it is time to work, all unrelated activity in the work area ceases immediately.
- Differences of opinion are discussed privately.
- Unless on break or finished for the day, don't leave the work or stand-by area without informing or asking permission of the appropriate person.

# Handy Forms

On the next few pages you'll find boilerplates for:

## **Casting Sign-in Sheet**

For actors to use when they arrive at a casting call.

## **Casting appointment Calendar**

For office use when making audition appointments.

## **Boilerplate Talent Contract**

Based on the contract in the AFTRA-Public Radio Agreement.

## **Call Sheet**

To distribute to production personnel before rehearsals begin to notify everyone of when and where they are required.

## **Studio and Talent Time Forms**

To use in sessions to keep accurate track of expenditures.

## **Track Sheets**

To use while recording as an aid to editing and post-production.

## **Production Logs**

For permanent records.

## **Cue Sheet**

To send to local stations.

PRODUCTION COMPANY  
SERIES AND/OR PLAY TITLE  
DATE

please print

[illegible]

The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist  
PRODUCTION COMPANY  
SERIES AND/OR PLAY TITLE  
DATE

CASTING APPOINTMENT **CALENDAR**

Time	Scheduled Actor's Name	
	Date	Date
10:30 am		
10:40 am		
10:50 am		
11:00 am		
11:10 am		
11:20 am		
11:30 am		
11:40 am		
11:50 am		
Break		
1:00 pm		
1:10 pm		
1:20 pm		
1:30 pm		
1:40 pm		
1:50 pm		
2:00 pm		
2:10 pm		
2:20 pm		
2:30 pm		
2:40 pm		
2:50 pm		
break		
3:20 pm		
3:30 pm		
3:40 pm		

The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

**ENGAGEMENT CONTRACT**

[DATE]

Between [ACTOR'S NAME], hereinafter called "performer," and [PRODUCTION ENTITY'S NAME] of [PRODUCER'S ADDRESS], hereinafter called "producer."

Performer shall render artistic services in connection with the rehearsal, recording and release of the program(s) designated below in connection with the part or parts to be played:

TITLE OF PROGRAM: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE(S) AND TIME(S) OF REHEARSAL/PERFORMANCE:\* See attached production schedule

LOCATION(S):\* See attached production schedule

PART(S) TO BE PLAYED: \_\_\_\_\_ and as cast

COMPENSATION: \_\_\_\_\_

Execution of this Engagement Contract signifies acceptance by producer and performer of all the above terms and conditions and those on the reverse hereof and attached hereto.

PERFORMER

PRODUCER

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

BY \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security #

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

\*Subject to change in accordance with AFTRA-PUBLIC RADIO AGREEMENT

# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

1. Performer shall render performer's services in connection with this engagement in a cooperative and professional manner to the best of the performer's ability, and subject to producer's direction and control. Performer will abide by all reasonable rules and regulations of producer, and will refrain from any offensive or distasteful remarks or conduct in connection with this engagement. Performer shall, if and as required by this written contract, be available to participate in program inserts and leads into and out of such program.
2.
  - (a) Performer shall indemnify producer, all non-broadcast entities and all stations and/or networks broadcasting or publishing the program against any and all claims, damages, liabilities, costs and expenses (including reasonable attorney's fees) arising out of the use of any materials, ideas, creations, and properties (hereinafter called "materials") whether or not required of performer, furnished by performer in connection with this agreement, and any ad libs spoken or unauthorized acts done by performer in connection therewith. Producer shall similarly indemnify performer in respect to "materials" furnished by producer, and acts done or words spoken by performer at producer's request. Each party will give the other prompt notice of any such claims and/or legal proceedings and shall cooperate with the other on all matters covered by this paragraph.
  - (b) If this Engagement Contract requires, as an express additional provision, that performer furnish materials (hereinafter called "required materials") in connection with his/her performance hereunder, performer shall submit such required materials to producer at such time prior to performance thereof as may reasonably be designated by producer, and such required materials shall, as between producer and performer, unless otherwise expressly provided in this Engagement Contract under the heading "Additions," be and remain the property of the performer.
3. In full payment for performer's services and the rights and privileges granted to producer hereunder, producer shall pay performer the compensation hereinbefore specified not later than twelve (15) business days after the final day in which performer's services shall have been rendered, subject to the deduction of such taxes and withholdings as are authorized or required by law. There shall be no obligation on producer's part to produce or broadcast the program or use performer's services or materials, if any.
4. The program hereunder may be originally broadcast and/or published as a commercial recording either live or by recording over the facilities arranged by or for producer anywhere in the world. The term "recordings" as used herein shall mean and include any recording or recordings made whether before or during a broadcast transmission, by electrical transcription, tape recording, wire recording, film or any other similar or dissimilar method of recording radio programs, whether now known or hereafter developed. All recordings as between producer and performer shall be producer's sole property.
5. Producer is prohibited from requiring the performer to refrain from rendering his/her services in connection with any other television or radio services for any period other than the actual rehearsal and broadcast period involved in this engagement, provided, however, that this prohibition shall not apply if the performer compensation for this engagement shall be \$500.00 or more.
6. This Engagement Contract, when executed by performer and producer, shall constitute the entire understanding between them, and shall be construed according to the laws of the State of [PRODUCER'S HOME STATE].



# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## NAME OF PRODUCTION

### CALL SHEET

**studio**

**Production Assistant**

**Producer**

Name  
street address  
City & Zip  
Phone

Name  
Phone  
email address

Name  
**Director**  
Name

Actor	Character	Time in	Time out	inclusive pg/line numbers
DATE				
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
DATE				
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00
Name	Name	00:00	00:00	00/00 - 00/00

PRODUCTION COMPANY  
SERIES AND/OR PLAY TITLE

TALENT TIME FORM

Actor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time in		Time Out	Initials

NOTES

\_\_\_\_\_  
talent signature for the producer

The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

PRODUCTION COMPANY  
SERIES AND/OR PLAY TITLE

STUDIO TIME FORM

Studio \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time in		Time Out	Initials

NOTES

for the studio for the producer

# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## PRODUCTION COMPANY

PLAY AND/OR SERIES ACT \_\_\_\_ SCENE \_\_\_\_

TRACK SHEET

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ DAT # \_\_\_\_\_

take	counter	pg/ln start	pg line end	W T	di sc ar d	ke ep	us e	Notes
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
12								

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## PRODUCTION LOGS

TITLE			
AUTHOR			
ADAPTATION/TRANSLATION			
PRODUCTION ENTITY			
FUNDER/CLIENT			
ROLE	PLAYER	ROLE	PLAYER
PRODUCER		DIRECTOR	
COMPOSER		MUSICAL DIR.	
RECORDIST		MIXER	
FOLEY WALKER		PROD. ASST.	
SCRIPT RIGHTS			
MUSIC RIGHTS			
PRODUCTION RIGHTS			
PRODUCTION DATE(S)			
PRODUCTION STUDIO(S)			
FIRST BROADCAST/PUBLICATION			
SUBSEQUENT B'DCAST/PUBL. DATE(S)			

# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## CUE SHEET

### SERIES OR PLAY TITLE

### Episode Number And/or Title

#### Part One

Cue in: “[First sound/music and full sentence heard in the production.]”

00:00 [length of Part One in minutes and seconds]

Cue Out: “[last sound/music and full sentence heard before the first break.]”

00:00 silence *[or* 00:00 musical bed]

#### Part Two

Cue in: “[First sound/music and full sentence heard in Part Two.]”

00:00 [length of Part Two]

Cue Out: “[last sound/music and full sentence heard in the program.]”

## Credits, Tags and Wrap-arounds

Films and television have more or less settled on an industry standard for production credits — which go at the beginning, which go at the end, who are mentioned, who aren't, what names go at the top and before and after the title, what at the end, in what order. Some of these things make no sense to most audiences. Who knows what a “grip” is or a “best boy?” What's the difference between a “guest artist” and a “guest star?” For the most part viewers do not know or care about the contractual arrangements and Hollywood pecking order that determines such things and that have little to do with the artistic contributions made to the opus involved.

Audio drama has no such standardization. We do not even use the same terms for the same functions. For the sake of clarity and for the acknowledgment of the deserving, I think a general agreement on credits and announcements ought to be put in practice. Fortunately, contractual and industry pecking orders do not hamper us. At times, we do have to consider favors we owe and feelings we ought not step on. Nonetheless the following recommendations should serve a useful guide.

### Your Announcer

Your announcer may not be the same artist who narrates the play. The narrator describes the play's action and environment, the announcer delivers the wrap-arounds — the billboard, the credits, the in and out cues for the act breaks. If you hire the same talent to narrate and announce, you should make that person aware of the different functions of announcements and narration so that he or she can vocally differentiate the two.

Your announcer should have a pleasant and professional sound. He should work the mike closely for a warm sound at a fairly intimate volume. You should direct the announcer to speak in a style complementary to the tone of the work — lightly for a comedy, dignified for a drama, etc. When you're performing before a house audience, the announcer's dynamic should be livelier, not so intimate, something bespeaking the excitement of live presentation.

If I could, I'd use one announcer for all my published productions. Doing so, gives your collected *ouuvres* a sense of institutional identity. “Ah, I recognize that voice! This must be a Sally So-and-so production!” Another school of thought believes that you cast an announcer the way you cast the roles in the play itself. One kind of voice and approach suit a comedy, others work better for high drama, horror, period pieces, etc. I've preferred to use one announcer versatile enough

### Broadcast Wrap-arounds

#### Opening

Get to the play proper as soon as possible. A listener bored by lengthy preliminaries can and will switch to another station rather than wait patiently for the good stuff. Therefore, opening announcements, the “billboard,” should only be long enough to dispense essential information and to register in the listener's mind. If too brief, the announcement will end before the audience can focus on it. A musical bed (called the MAIN TITLE) helps draw attention to and expand the billboard.



## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

If I have a major sponsor, funder or grantor, I give it a mention it first thing. The money folks like it. Also, it's the one thing I don't mind getting lost when a listener tunes in late.

The following program is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

(Teaser)

(Billboard)

(Act One)

Billboard the network (if you are distributing through one), the production entity, the series and episode titles and the author. The announcer should separate the phrases.

(MAIN TITLE UP, ESTABLISH, FADE, CONTINUE UNDER:)

National Private Radio presents . . . the Hollywood Theater of the Ear production of . . . *Perfidy and Perfection* . . . an "epistolary romance" by Charlotte de Quincy.

(MUSIC UP AND OUT.)

... or...

(MAIN TITLE UP, ESTABLISH, FADE, CONTINUE UNDER:)

Public Radio Worldwide presents . . . the Hollywood Theater of the Ear production of . . . BUCKLES AND SWASH — TALES OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE . . . . Tonight — *Perfidy and Perfection*, an "epistolary romance" by Charlotte de Quincy.

(MUSIC UP AND OUT.)

If you have engaged name talent, you can, and probably should, mention them "above the title" in alphabetical order.

The Nordstrand Network presents . . . the Prairie Wolf Radio Theater production of . . . BUCKLES AND SWASH — TALES OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE . . . . Tonight, Martin Spleen and Jennifer Lopeste in . . . *Perfidy and Perfection*, an "epistolary romance" by Charlotte de Quincy.

## Breaks

Wrap every break with an announcement at the top and the bottom. The audience needs a few seconds of transition. Before the break:

In a moment, Act Two of *Perfidy and Perfection*.

...or...

BUCKLES AND SWASH will return with Act Two of *Perfidy and Perfection* after this brief pause.

...or...

In a moment Martin Spleen and Jennifer Lopeste will return in *Perfidy and Perfection*. In a moment, Act Two. But first, these brief messages.

After the break:

The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist  
And now . . . Act Two of *Perfidy and Perfection*.

Before and after the *last* break:

In a moment, the conclusion of (etc.)

And now, the conclusion of (etc.)

Use “conclusion” instead of “Act Two,” “Act Three” or whatever, as a slight antidote to the Law of Diminishing Returns.

### End-Credits

The most important names go first: the author, followed by the principals. Identify the latter by role and list them in order of appearance. After the principles, the remaining cast in alphabetical order. Do not list walla nor identify the roles non-principals are playing.

You have been listening to [TITLE] by [AUTHOR]. \*

You have heard [ACTOR] as [ROLE]...

...[ACTOR] as [ROLE]...

...[ACTOR] as [ROLE]...

...[ACTOR] as [ROLE]...

...and [ACTOR] as [ROLE]...

...with [NAME],[NAME],[NAME] and [NAME].

Pecking order for the production crew is as follows:

The play was directed by [NAME]...

... produced by [NAME]...

... and featured original music by [NAME]...

... conducted (or performed) by [NAME]...

[NAME] was Executive Producer...

...[NAME], casting director...

...[NAME], recordist... \*\*

...[NAME], editor...

...[NAME], mixer...

...[NAME], foley walker... \*

...and...

...[NAME(s)], [TITLES]. \*\*

---

\* Here's where you would mention "...adapted for radio by...." or "...translated by...." or, if you're a triple threat, "...written, produced and directed by...", omitting the producer and director mentions further down the credits.

\*\*or [NAME(s)] engineered...

\* I advise not to use obscure terms as titles in the credits. However, I disbey my own rule when it comes to the sound effects operators. I like the term "foley walker." It suggests stature that "sound effects operator" or "sound effects by" does not possess.

\*\*Credits end with names of non-artists who contributed to the production, such as technical or scholarly advisors, researchers, dramaturgs, and P.A.s in that order. I don't like to use a big list of crew members or acknowledgements. But, because your broadcast program has to reach an exact length, the closing credits can be expanded or contracted to meet time

The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist  
[FUNDING OR SPONSORSHIP CREDIT, OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, IF  
APPLICABLE, GO HERE.]

This has been a production of [PRODUCTION ENTITY]...  
...And I am [ANNOUNCER'S NAME].

If the program is part of a series:

You have been listening to [SERIES] and [TITLE] by [AUTHOR].

...and later....

[SERIES] is a production of [PRODUCTION ENTITY]...

If you're working with a network, it will probably require that you end the program with a  
"system cue," such as:

This is NPR — National Public Radio.

## Commercial Recordings

Many audiobook publishers prescribe copy for announcements (or "tags," as they're often called). Even so, you have some leeway to customize the tags or to adjust them to satisfy your preferences. If you're self-publishing, as, say, the LA Theatre Works and ZBS do, you can, of course, do whatever you like. The following recommendations are for the self-publisher.

### Opening

Plays on cassette, compact disk, the Internet, etc., can afford to open slower in these media than when producing for broadcast. You can presume that, after buying the volume, tearing off the shrink wrap, removing the recording from its container and placing it in the player — or downloading it to the computer or ipod — listeners will more patiently await their reward than those who can so quickly and easily switch the radio off or to another channel. Be that as it may, while I may forego a teaser or narrative hook at the top of the first side, I still prefer a brief opening billboard, such as the one for broadcast detailed above.

### Closing

Since you don't need to shoe-horn your production into an exact time-slot, you don't need to mention your bookkeeper and janitor just to fill. On rare occasions, your credits may push you over the last cassette side or CD, in which case you will have to prune them rather than add a mostly blank additional cassette or CD. In either case, I still prefer to restrict the closing credits to those who have contributed artistically or technically to the production. I think listing everybody and his brother diminishes the recognition given the deserving artists and technicians.

Use the same wording for the opening and closing wrap-arounds that I suggested above for broadcast. In addition, you may wish to add additional copy, such as a copyright notice,\* plugs for your web site and/or other recordings, a gloss of the play or recording, background information about your production group. These additional items belong at the very end, after the closing credits.

### Tags

---

requirements by adding or eliminating names.

\* Legally, this is unnecessary for cassettes and CDs, though advisable for downloads. Nonetheless, audiobook publishers tend to include one anyway.

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

Strictly speaking, tagging, or announcing the beginning and ending of cassette sides and compact disks, isn't mandatory. It is a convenience you provide for the listener. If you decide to use them, your announcer should read them at a modestly slow tempo. Separate them from the play proper with a pause of a second or two.

### **On cassettes:**

At the end of A sides:

This play is continued on the other side of this cassette.

At the beginning of side B and all subsequent sides:

[TITLE] continued, cassette [NUMBER], side [NUMBER]

At the end of all B sides, except the last:

This play is continued on cassette [NUMBER], side [NUMBER]

### **On CDs:**

At the end of all disks, except the last:

This play is continued on disk [NUMBER]

At the beginning of all disks, except the first:

[TITLE] continued, disk [NUMBER]

## Labels

In addition to or instead of production credits in the recording itself, I find it advisable to include production credits in print on the back cover or an insert or the inside pages of a one-fold CD label. If you felt it necessary you have room to include staff as well as production personnel on those inside pages or insert.

### Front Cover Copy

Reserve the front cover for essential information — that which identifies or helps sell the production.

### Back Cover Copy

Not much room here. Credits have to fit with:

- a blurb
- the copyright
- the International Standard Book Number\* and bar code
- the publisher's, or your, logo
- the retail price
- the length ("approximately five hours thirty minutes on five cassettes")
- the "abridged" or "unabridged" notice

---

\* The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a 10-digit number that establishes and identifies one title or edition of a title from one specific publisher and is unique to that edition, allowing for more efficient marketing and tracking of products by audio, video, book and software publishers, stores, libraries, universities, wholesalers and distributors.

## The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

Therefore, I use the highly compressed style you see on movie ads. Use a compact type-face and set in this fashion:

INCOMPETENT AUDIO PUBLISHING presents a ERSATZ AUDIO THEATER  
production  
BEATRICE HEADLINER FRANK MOVIESTAR "MASTERPIECE"  
SUPPORTING AKTOR  
PLAYER ALOISCIOUS ACTOR BUTTERWORTH TALENT Q CRANE  
PERFORMER DULWICH THESPIAN EFRAM INGENUE FRANKLIN  
CHARACTER MAN COMIC RELIEF BADGUY VILLAIN  
author INSPIRD G NYUS producer OVVUR BAIRINK director E. GOMAY NIAK  
engineer WARREN DUFUS  
original music VLADIMIR HACK foley walkers TONY X PUTZAMO GAIL  
MANLY

Hard to read, but better than nothing.

### Insert

In an insert or on the inside pages of a one-fold jewel case label, you have space for a roomier style approximating a theater playbill. A playbill style cast and crew list looks more or less like this:

#### **Incompetent Audio Publishing**

presents the

#### **Ersatz Audio Theater**

production of

#### **MASTERPIECE**

by

Inspird G Nyus

TOM ..... Frank Moviestar  
SUE ..... Ingenue Franklin  
GREGG ..... Supporting Aktor  
NORMAN ..... Player Aloiscious  
CHARLES ..... Performer Dulwich  
SARAH ..... Talent Q. Crane  
JERRY ..... Thespian Efram  
PEGGY ..... Beatrice Headliner

Director ..... E. Gomay Niak  
Producer ..... Ovvur Bairink  
Original Music ..... Vladimir Hack  
Engineer ..... Warren Dufus  
Foley Walkers ..... Tony X. Putzamo  
..... Gail Manly

I find a style adapted from that seen in movie end-credits more modern and easier to read:

# The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

## Incompetent Audio Publishing

presents the

## Ersatz Audio Theater

production of

## MASTERPIECE

by

Inspird G Nyus

	TOM	Frank Moviestar
	SUE	Ingenuer Franklin
	GREGG	Supporting Aktor
	NORMAN	Player Aloiscious
CHARLES .....		Performer Dulwich
SARAH .....		Talent Q. Crane
JERRY .....		Thespian Efram
PEGGY .....		Beatrice Headliner
Director .....	E Gomay Niak	
Producer .....	Ovvur Bairink	
Original Music .....	Vladimir Hack	
Engineer .....	Warren Dufus	
Foley Walkers .....	Tony X. Putzamo	
	Gail Manly	

## Further Study

### On-line Resources

Audio Theater.com. Contains news and information of audio theater producers. Information only sporadically kept current.

BBC World Service. [www.bbc.co.uk/radio](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio).

BBC Radio Drama Writers' Guidelines. [bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writing/radiodrama.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writing/radiodrama.shtml)

BBC "Scriptsmart" Template Software for Microsoft Word. [bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scriptsmart](http://bbc.co.uk/writersroom/scriptsmart)

National Audio Theater Festivals website. [nfc.org](http://nfc.org).

National Center for Voice and Speech. [ncvs.org](http://ncvs.org). Advice on vocal health.

*Principles of Writing Radio Drama* by Jim Crook. [irdp.co.uk/scripts.htm](http://irdp.co.uk/scripts.htm).

*Radio Drama - Directing, Acting, Technical, Learning & Teaching, Researching, Styles, Genres* by Alan Beck. [savoyhill.co.uk/technique](http://savoyhill.co.uk/technique).

Radio Spirits. [radiospirits.com](http://radiospirits.com). Source of CDs of OTR.

### OTR Radio Theater Worth Hearing

*Campbell's Playhouse* (series) also called *Mercury Theater of the Air*

*CBS Radio Workshop* (series)

*13 by Corwin* (series)

*Dimension X* (series)

*Fall of the City* (radio play) by Archibald MacLeish

*Gunsmoke* (series)

*Let's Pretend* (series)

*Drop Dead* (album), episodes of *Lights Out* written and directed by Arch Oboler

*Sorry Wrong Number* (radio play) by Louise Fletcher

*Stan Freberg Presents the United States of America, Vol. I* (album)

*Suspense* (series)

*Yours Truly Johnny Dollar* (series)

*Vic and Sade* (series)

*X Minus 1* (series)

### Print Resources

Berry, Cicely. *Voice and the Actor*. Virgin Books. 1990.

Buyers, Judy. *Words on Tape*. Audio CD Publishing. 1997.

### The Well-Tempered Audio Dramatist

Crook, Tim. *Radio Drama. Theory and Practice*. Routledge. 1999.

Grebanier, Bernard. *Playwriting*. Barnes & Noble. 1982.

MacLoughlin, Shaun. *Writing for Radio: How to Write Plays, Features and Short Stories That Get You on Air*. Soundplay. 2004.

McInerney, Vincent. *Writing for Radio*. Manchester University Press. 2001.

McLeish, Robert. *Radio Production*. Focal Press. 2005.

Mott, Robert L. *Radio Sound Effects*. McFarland & Co, 1992.

Stanislavsky, Constantine. *An Actor Prepares*. (tr., E.R. Hapgood) Theatre Arts Books; Reprint edition. 1989.

Thom, Randy. *Audio Craft: An Introduction to the Tools and Techniques of Audio Production*. NFCB. 1982 & revised.

Turnbull, Robert B. *Radio & Television Sound Effects*. Rinehart & Co, 1951.

### Modern Audio Plays Worth Reading or Hearing

Adams, Douglas. *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Beckett, Samuel. *All That Fall*.

Dürrenmatt, Friedrich and Alfred Schild (tr.). *The Mission of the Vega* also called *Operation Vega* (*Das Unternehmen der Wega*).

Gurney, Jim and Tom Lopez. *Dinotopia*.

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## The 24-Karat Audio Theater Company

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