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THEATRE BLOG



The podcast's the thing to revive radio drama

With everything from Shakespeare to short experimental pieces available on MP3, we're entering a new golden age of audio theatre.

Last week, the [Department for Education and Skills](#) announced that it would provide free downloads of Shakespeare podcasts. Starting with a live recording of [Much Ado About Nothing](#), made at the Globe Theatre last month, it aims to help those without easy access to professional productions to engage with performance. This is not a substitute for live shows, but will be a welcome complement to slogging through the texts. The Royal Shakespeare Company has used podcasts in similar ways, and with the ubiquity of MP3 players and the popularity of podcasting, we could be on the threshold of a new golden age of audio drama. TV won the battle decades ago, but is a fight back now on the cards?

Frederick Greenhalgh of [Radio Drama Revival!](#) thinks so. His blog, which began at the end of last year, includes a range of new radio dramas. He is based in the US, where audio theatre, he admits, is still an especially "small world" desperately in need of promotion; but he is convinced that things are changing. Greenhalgh runs [Final Rune Productions](#) and is dedicated to making this happen. He reminds us that that [Orson Welles started in radio](#), and [laments](#) the current paucity of commercial radio drama in the US: "Today's modern radio drama scene can be characterized as an orphaned medium with a lot of guts but not a lot of polish."

The popularity of programmes such as [Sonic Theater](#) on XM Radio and sites such as [Dramapod](#) also indicate a resurgence, though a quick look at the latter's main categories - Superhero, Dr Who, Star Trek - points to Greenhalgh's fears. He is enthusiastic about the more illustrious recent history of radio drama in the UK: "They actually think it's valuable to have written stories recorded and played on the radio for people. What's crazier, is that they PAY people to do it!"

Since the passing of the [classic era of American radio](#), Britain has definitely led the way, but we've relied on Radio 3 and Radio 4 for too long. Surely it's time for some more sources of audio theatre to put on our MP3s? To be fair, the BBC has responded to the new technology and interest, and has recently set up [Audiotheque](#), a project dedicated to "creative audio", which it defines as "innovative, original audio with some kind of narrative. It could mix elements of fiction and documentary material, it might be completely dialogue-free. As long as it's fresh and different from standard radio drama. It also needs to be under three minutes long." It's worth browsing through the site to

Chock
full o' Nuts.



Rollover to Stop
the Madness.

9/7/2009

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stumble across small gems such as this oddly compelling (French) [piece of audio theatre](#) without words.

Just in case you're still not convinced about radio's fight back, Audiotheque's creator Conor Lennon is currently masterminding [Radio 4's first feature film](#). Two 45-minute radio dramas, based on a story by Peter Ackroyd, will be put to visuals and shown at London's IMAX. The project aims to revert the dominant relationship between sight and sound: welcome to the new concept of the "vision track".

"Radio is very excited about introducing visual material because of new technology," comments Lennon. "In Korea they are developing Eye River radio sets which can transmit images to accompany the sound and Radio 4 wants to be a part of this multiplatform revolution." I look forward to the vision tracks of the future that might help to spice up GCSE Shakespeare. A psychedelic Hamlet anyone?

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