

Spring 2001

AIRSPACE

Published Quarterly by the Association of Independents in Radio

328 Flatbush Avenue, #322, Brooklyn, NY 11238 (888)YES-AIR7 Fax: (718)857-3376 <http://www.airmedia.org> dolores_brandon@hotmail.com

AIR at the NFCB Conference 2001

By Dolores Brandon
Executive Director

dolores_brandon@hotmail.com



Oh, the incredible lightness of Spring in San Francisco after a long winter in surly New York. Oh, so many people to meet and greet, sessions to organize and attend – the spunky energy of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters conference being just the right antidote for a life spent too much in virtual space! I dare say, however, the opportunity to socialize for minutes, hours, days over breakfast, lunch, and exhibition tables with the real live folk who make community radio often had me spinning on AIR.” So where did the tribe officially gather?

The AIR Meeting: Why We’re in This Crazy Business

A panel convened and moderated by AIR Board member Sue Schardt (Schardt Media).

Not surprisingly, the matter of money took center stage: how to make more and where to raise it. The first question posed came from veteran producer Gregg McVicar, who asked, “How do you think the downturn in the economy will impact independents?” No one could say for sure, but the general consensus was, it depends on how long and deep a recession it is, and anything that reduces assets at foundations will hurt independents in the long run.

Offering words of encouragement, Michael Toms (New Dimensions Radio), who dubs himself “the most successful producer never to receive funding from the CPB,” urged producers to go outside the box built with government, foundations and corporate support to explore what he has found to be a rewarding arena – that of the private donor. Adi Gevins (Real Reality Research), ever the passionate crusader, insisted, “If you want to do a piece badly enough, you will find the money!” One newcomer to radio complained, “I just want to get paid for my work, I don’t want to have to raise money for every project I do,” to which Reese Ehrlich responded, “Under capitalism, people who create products are supposed to be paid for their work. In public radio, we’ve got upside down socialism: we raise money on our own and then beg networks and stations to air it for free.”

continued on Page 2

New Models for Documentary Distribution

By Steve Rowland
President

steve_rowland@email.msn.com

Recently I have devoted this space to discussion of formal AIR matters – this month I’d like to talk about distribution of documentaries on public radio, and use my own recent experiences as a model.

The public-radio relationship to documentaries in the early 21st century is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand there are new outlets for documentaries, and more people producing them. These outlets include new programs on existing channels, and entirely new channels like the XM and Sirius satellite networks. On the other hand, the established networks are retreating from their past support and vigorous marketing of specials of any kind. For many years, the goal for independent producers has been to get placed with one of the two networks, PRI or NPR. They have been the only game in town – and it has not been easy for producers to get recognized. Well, they aren’t the only game in town anymore, and I’m suggesting that independents begin to explore new possibilities. In fact the pressure on local stations from the satellite networks is making many of them more interested in dealing with independents directly.

Background

Over the past few years, the terms of placing an independently produced show at one of the networks have changed too – for the worse. Both NPR and PRI seem to have less desire to acquire, and market, specials of any kind. What is behind this change in attitude? In the mid-90’s, David Giovanonni’s CPB-funded audience-demographic studies began to turn in data that looked bad for specials producers – not only documentaries, but specials of any kind. The studies suggested that it is hard to get people to turn to the radio to listen to a particular show – we’ve known this for years – people have favorite stations, and they listen to the station, to the format. We knew it was hard to get people to tune in especially for one program. The studies suggested that people use radio in different ways than they use TV – that isn’t terribly surprising either. But look at Ken Burns’ recent **Jazz** series on public TV – Burns is a

continued on Page 6

In this issue:

AIR Survey 2001	4	The World of Audio Drama	10
Revised Code of Fair Practices	8	Producer Profile	14

AIR Meets at the NFCB

continued from Page 1

The AIR panel gave way to the *official* AIR meeting – a cacophony of talk and laughter and general mayhem as people hungrily greeted those they had not seen in months, years, or for that matter – ever!

AIR Goes to Dinner

Following the “meeting,” about 17 of us took a short walk to an off-the-beaten-track Asian restaurant – KITES (chosen by Reese Ehrlich) – in the Civic Center area. As we settled ourselves around two large red tables, the very practical no-nonsense matron of the establishment hustled us through our orders. With the cook sitting conspicuously idle in the well-exposed kitchen, and few other patrons, some of us were a trifle skeptical. Until the food began to cook. Then the fragrance of garlic, Thai curries, and the haunting smell of a wood-burning stove embraced and assured us all! A genuine feast followed! AIR bought wine and beer for all!

AIR Offers a Bridge over Troubled Waters

Early Saturday morning, I hosted a session on cultural programming with guest presenters Peggy Berryhill and Larry Abrams. Peggy Berryhill is a public-radio legend – the queen of Native American radio. With 30 years in the business, Peggy has much to teach, much wisdom to pass on and a fabulous new show to boot!! **Club Red**, an extraordinarily rich radio montage of satire, music and poetry, is an example of cultural programming that completely breaks the mold. Peggy’s rule: be true to yourself. Is there any better advice? At 8:30 in the morning, to have a room full of culturally very diverse people laughing as hard as we all did at the humor of the **Club Red** team – Charlie Hill, Bruce King, Carla Plante, Joe Paulino and Steve Tokar – is no mean feat! Then, Larry Abrams, writer/collaborator working with AIR’s very own Steve Rowland, played excerpts from their latest, yet-to-be-broadcast four-hour series, **Tell Me How Long Trane’s Been Gone**. Weaving an audio tapestry of poetry, oral history, historical commentary and of course Coltrane’s music, Rowland and Abrams effectively break the more traditional cultural programming mold that would have us listening to Coltrane without hearing the sounds and voices of the social, political and spiritual forces that made him one of the most inspiring artists of the 20th century. Ironically, although Berryhill’s **Spirits of the Present: the Legacy from Native America** and Abrams/Rowland’s **Miles Davis Project** each share the record for highest carriage of a limited series, those producers still face skepticism and resistance when they approach the networks with a new show for distribution.

Thanks to all who helped put AIR on the map at the NFCB conference!

Now You Can Pay Your AIR Dues by Credit Card, Check, or PayPal

AIR is now accepting Visa and Mastercard for dues payments. See the Membership Form on page 3 for detail. Or if you prefer, use PayPal, a web-based service. You can set up a FREE Pay Pal account, at <http://www.paypal.com>. Then you can pay direct to pay@airmedia.org.

A I R S P A C E

The Official Publication of



**Association of
Independents in Radio**

Published quarterly, AIRSPACE is free to all members. For membership rates, see form on Page 3.

Newsletter mailings: Janet Dagley Dagley, Editor
P.O. Box 3146, Hoboken, NJ 07030 USA
(201) 239-6310

AIR Board of Directors

Dolores Brandon, Executive Director/Secretary
(888) YES-AIR7 dolores_brandon@hotmail.com

Steve Rowland, President
(215) 843-4388 steve_rowland@email.msn.com

Janet Dagley Dagley, Vice President
(201) 239-6310 daeggadaegga@rcn.com

Kathy Gronau, Treasurer
(323) 655-5214 kgronau@pacbell.net

Keith Brickhouse
(978) 546-8474 KBrickhous@aol.com

Maureen Jackson
(415) 637-1631 mojackson@hotmail.com

Tanya Ott
(407) 856-1874 tanya_ott@yahoo.com

Dmae Roberts
(503) 233-2919 MediaR@aol.com

Steve Robinson
(402) 472-9333 x346 cyberlearn@aol.com

Rebecca Rumsey
(720) 890-9625 rumseyr@earthlink.net

Susan Schardt
(617) 436-9024 schardt@mindspring.com

Steve Spencer
(937) 767-6422 sspencer@wyso.org

Hard Numbers, Heartfelt Words

By Janet Dagley Dagley

AIRSPACE Editor

daeggadaegga@rcn.com

I never intended to make AIRSPACE look like The Wall Street Journal, so I must apologize for the gray, text-filled pages of this issue. Our drab appearance may be a bit inappropriate for spring, but we had so much good material that I tried to include all of it.

We have some hard numbers in this issue, the results of the AIR member survey conducted by Kathy Gronau and staff. An AIR board member since 1995, Kathy has worked as an independent marketing consultant promoting arts projects and radio shows for 14 years.

The Fair Practices Committee has revised the AIR/PAG Code of Fair Practices for Working with Freelance Radio Producers; we've published that important document in its entirety.

Susan Morris of Pittsburgh is the first AIR producer to introduce herself in what we hope will be a regular series of self-profiles.

Two of the articles in this issue began as messages to e-mail lists, and both Dale Willman and Brian Price were kind enough to expand those posts for AIRSPACE. Dale originally posted his heartfelt words to the NEWSLINK list.

Brian's essay, begun as a post to the radio-drama list, is part of a two-page spread on audio drama, along with an interview with former AIRSPACE Editor Sue Zizza, executive director of the National Audio Theatre Festival.

But wait, there's more: Steve Rathe takes us all to the White House to applaud NPR and other arts medal recipients.

With all that and more, we even had to put the classified ads on hold to make room. I hope they won't be missed this time.

Apply Now for an AIR Mentorship

The AIR Mentoring Program is one of AIR's more valuable offerings. It is a way for relative newcomers to independent production to get off to a stable start, or for more experienced producers to learn one area of production or distribution that may be less familiar to them.

Any AIR member may request a mentor. Mentoring is also available to member stations. The AIR member/station contacts the mentoring coordinator. The coordinator determines the applicant's needs in conversation or by e-mail, and attempts to make a match of an appropriate mentor. Stations may request on-site mentoring. The mentoring consists of 4 sessions, up to 1 hour each. These are normally conducted by telephone (mentees pay for calls) and email. Often the mentee sends written material and/or tape excerpts to the mentor for review, before the sessions begin. The mentor may include some of this review time as part of the 4-hour total. The topics can range from a broad overview of public radio production & distribution, to specific areas including interviewing, recording techniques, post production and editing techniques, grant writing, station outreach, scriptwriting, program content development, and more.

At the end of the mentoring program, both mentee and mentor are required to submit a short written statement about the experience to the mentoring coordinator.

For more information, contact:

Steve Rowland Steve_Rowland@email.msn.com

AIR's Mentor Program is made possible through grants from The John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and The National Endowment for the Arts.

AIR Membership Form

INDIVIDUALS

____ Two Years (8 issues of AIRSPACE) at a special rate of \$135.00 (includes 10% discount over one-year rate)

____ One Year (4 issues of AIRSPACE) at the regular rate of \$75.00

COMPANIES and ORGANIZATIONS

____ One Year at the rate of \$125.00 -- for those with annual budgets under \$500,000.00 (Allows 2 members to join the AIR e-mail list)

____ One Year at the rate of \$200.00 -- for those with annual budgets over \$500,000.00 (Allows 3 members to join the AIR e-mail list)

____ One Year at the rate of \$1,000.00 -- for networks.

STUDENTS

____ One year (4 issues of AIRSPACE) at the special rate of \$30.00. Please enclose a copy of your valid student ID.

Members with non-U.S. addresses, please add \$10.00 to the above charges to cover additional postage

PLEASE ENROLL ME AS A MEMBER OF AIR OR RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP

Please specify: ____ New ____ Renewal

NAME: _____

ADDRESS _____

COMPANY OR ORGANIZATION NAME:

(The AIR Directory will show this category for organizational members only)

ADDRESS _____

HOME PHONE: _____

BUSINESS PHONE: _____

FAX: _____

E-MAIL: _____

For Credit Card Payments:

CREDIT CARD #: _____

EXPIRATION: ____ / ____

Or pay online at <http://www.paypal.com> -- send payments to pay@airmedia.org

Please make checks payable to AIR. Mail this form to:

AIR
c/o Kathy Gronau
448 N. Kilkea Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90048

Survey 2001: Who We Are, What We Do,

AIR jumped into the new year feet first, devoting the better part of January and February to a telephone survey of its membership. Kathy Gronau and her crew at Creative PR in Los Angeles made an effort to reach and talk to every AIR member. However, given the very busy lives independents lead, that proved impossible. Nevertheless, we are happy to report that approximately 2/3 of the membership did participate.

We had three main reasons for doing this survey:

1. To identify members who would be mentors, and catalog their skills in order to create a readily searchable database for setting up mentorships.

2. To develop a list of producers with programs available and suitable for inclusion in an independent hour of programming oriented to new media

3. To develop a profile of AIR's members as we find out what they want from the organization. This type of information is extremely useful as AIR approaches funding sources for support to strengthen infrastructure and expand programs.

What follows is a summary of the findings:

Who Are We?

Independent producers devote long hours to their craft, sometimes with little or no pay, because of their dedication to the art, their belief in public radio, their devotion to a cause or to a story that must be told, and their desire to make a difference.

In 1992, a large gender gap existed – AIR was 68% male – but now the membership is 50/50 male and female. AIR is still predominately white (88%), and well educated (44% have bachelor's degrees; 31% have master's degrees, 7% have doctorates). AIR members have an average of nearly 17 years' experience in radio/audio work. A majority (65%) make less than \$50,000 a year in audio/radio – with 43% making less than \$35,000 annually. Most do not support themselves on radio/audio work alone: among all respondents, the average portion of total income from such work is 72.5%.

AIR members receive money from some 150 foundations and corporations, state and national arts and humanities foundations.

In answer to whether the climate has changed for independents in public radio, responses tended to reflect each person's own situation.

"The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer," one producer said.

For some, new shows such as **Studio 360**, **Justice Talking**, and **Jazz Riffs**, which commission the work of independents, pay well. Some felt that National Public Radio's efforts to reach out to producers has improved: "NPR has regional editors, so stories around the country can get picked up," one member said.

Some felt that their long hours and dedicated work had more value because working in public radio has more prestige and the audience for public radio had increased.

The main issue for AIR members is inadequate compensation. Most felt the pay situation had improved, though pay is still substandard and there are no benefits, insurance or security.

Although some radio producers get large grants to fund their projects, some say such funding is harder to come by. Previously, the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities were the only federal agencies to give grants to

individual artists. But now they only fund artists with ties to nonprofit organizations. AIR members see funds going to radio within the NEH and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting dropping annually, with grants given only to people known within the system, and for programs that are expected to draw large carriage and audiences.

Airtime on radio stations is the other big issue. As public-radio stations maximize their audience with seamless programming, specials, short series and niche-market programming like radio drama get short shrift on the schedule.

Finally, 79% of AIR members use digital editing software. Although it has made producers able to work faster, some complain that they receive no extra money for the added task.

You Name it, We Do It

AIR members work in every aspect of public radio as reporters, producers, hosts, executive producers, general managers, program directors, editors, sound technicians, engineers, news directors, and even color analysts for football. Outside radio, AIR members work at such jobs as: travel editor, audio artist, voice coach, management consultant, folklorist, archivist, healer, IT systems developer, professor, sound designer, district attorney and webmaster.

Radio producers develop skills in, among other things, writing, directing, speaking and editing. Because of the difficulties of the public-radio marketplace, producers use those skills in media alternatives such as the web, multilingual in-flight audio, film, TV, audio tours, books on tape, infomercials, oral histories, international radio, publications, theatre, web content and satellite channels.

Almost 90% of those surveyed work in non-commercial radio (83% in public radio; 52% at an NPR affiliate; 17% Pacifica, 15%, community college, 10%, Native American outlets, some 50 other outlets were named).

Members who obtain assignments by pitching their own projects outnumber those who are assigned projects by a 3 to 2 margin. However, a large number of members are in the executive producer category, where they have the luxury of being able to generate their own projects.

More AIR members produce cultural programs and documentaries than news features and series, but many produce all forms of programming. Their work is primarily distributed via NPR, the Public Radio Satellite, or on CD or cassette, with slightly less being distributed by Public Radio International. One in four respondents report that their programs are available, or are distributed online. Many producers report using every outlet available to them in order to deliver their programs to the widest possible audience.

Their work is heard on local stations as well as nationwide on all of the NPR and PRI magazines and other national series (**This American Life**, **Shickele Mix**, **Riverwalk**), as well as independently distributed (**Alternative Radio**, **Earthsongs**, **Pulse of the Planet**, **Best of our Knowledge**). Additionally, their standalone pieces, which air both locally and nationwide, number in the hundreds and have garnered numerous awards. Those include **Women of Tin Pan Alley**, **Telluride Jazz Festival**, **Remembering Slavery**, **Mei-Mei, a Daughter's Song**, **How the Railroad Shaped the Northwest**, **Rural Voices**, and **Andy Warhol: Sounds of His Life and Work**. And much of our work is also heard around the

How We Feel about AIR and Public Radio

world via the BBC, Armed Forces Radio, CBS Radio's **Osgood File**, Canadian, Australian and South African broadcast networks, and Deutschland Radio Berlin.

AIR Itself

AIR members spontaneously responded enthusiastically about the organization:

"AIR is tremendous!"

"AIR has helped me get into this field; it's a great organization. I wish it could be more face-to-face.

"It's important for AIR to facilitate the sharing of information among members."

"I'm quite proud to be a member of AIR."

"It's great to have this organization to find out what others are going through and to find people who have already done what I'm doing and can show me the way."

"It's nice to have an organization where I can feel connected to people working in all aspects of the field."

"I like the feeling of community..."

"It's an important time for the organization, and I appreciate its efforts to stay on top of developing issues."

Mentors

The mentoring program, recently underwritten by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, was of great interest to 185 members. Most members want to be mentored in grant writing, contract negotiations, and marketing, while they want to serve as mentors in scriptwriting, computer editing, mixing, interview styles, getting stories placed on shows, budgeting, and live-music recording. Nearly a third (29%) of respondents said they were ready to be both mentors and mentees in a number of areas, and potential mentors outnumber mentees by 2.74 to 1.

Other subjects producers wanted to see included in the mentoring program are directing, new media, journalism, international reporting, youth/children's radio, radio drama, voice, entrepreneurship, sound design, web audio, program development, field recording and fellowships.

Several members feel that the program will be valuable tool to "build the talent pool," and to "promote radio production." Many welcome technical mentoring. "I am so much more likely to buy equipment recommended by AIR members," one said. Another member commented, "The independent community perpetuates itself on the east and west coasts, but not elsewhere. Our farm club is independent producers." Once respondent was more adamant: "More people need to be trained in creating and producing quality programming. AIR needs to give workshops at the PRPD and other conferences, to upgrade skills."

AIR Communications

Most respondents were enthusiastic about AIR's role in facilitating communications among members. Several said they "love the newsletter. Use the magazine for provocative writing that will help influence policy."

By far the most popular benefit is the AIR e-mail list, better known as the AIR Daily. "Often, the public-radio community seems kind of clannish, and I sometimes get the feeling that the people in AIR are the same way. However, the listserv is very helpful; I read it regularly," one member said. Other comments:

"I love all the tech talk on AIR NEWS DAILY."

"I like the free flow of the dialogue. I find the equipment tips helpful."

"It has been helpful to me to lurk on the list, to see what kind of community is out there and what people are doing, what interesting projects are out there. There is nowhere else I could hear about it."

Conferences

Many spoke of the important role of conferences to build on this communication. "The conference in Washington D.C. was wonderful," one said, "It was great to meet my heroes and listen to programs." Several responses urged the importance of "developing seminars or symposiums" and "AIR conferences."

Distribution

A number of members feel AIR could be of service in helping market and distribute programs. One said that "AIR needs to be looking for extended distribution of its members' work, including conferences, potential business deals for its members and ITVS for radio." Another "wants to see AIR working more to connect networks' and stations' needs with what independent producers can supply." There was also a suggestion to initiate "a roundtable discussion on supplementary markets and other ways of using documentary material." Many are intrigued about the possibility of reaching new audiences through online distribution, but others cited the difficulty involved and raised concerns regarding rights and piracy.

Advocacy

When asked to rate organizational priorities for AIR on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important and 1 the least important, the respondents rated advocacy on behalf of producers with networks, programs and stations the most important priority with a 4.45; advocacy of behalf of producers with CPB and Congress next with a 4.32; maintaining a free streamed showcase for member work on the AIR third with a 3.31; founding regional chapters of AIR fourth with 3.09; and compiling a radio awards handbook fifth with 2.70.

Suggestions for strengthening AIR's organizing efforts were varied. Many agree that "AIR needs to continue bringing together independent producers and advocating on their behalf." However, as another said, "I have interest, but no time. Independents are hard to motivate. If there's no single rallying point, it's hard to get people to come together. I was a union organizer in Scotland. We had a great discussion at the AIR conference in Texas, but nothing ever happened to it." Several responses emphasized that "the number one activity needs to be to redouble efforts to create a fair and reasonable pay scale for independent producers who contribute to networks or programs that are distributed through the system."

Other AIR Priorities

A numbers of members would like to see a printed membership directory. Another "would like to see AIR as an umbrella for grants." In general, people were well aware of the importance of further organization, but unable or unwilling to offer a lot of time.

As one respondent rightly said, "It all seems important."

— summary provided by Kathy Gronau

New Models for Documentary Distribution

continued from page 1

master of marketing. Had that show aired with no national publicity campaign, no big associations with Sony and Verve – would people have watched all 19 hours? I doubt it. If you want people to watch specials they have to be promoted. You need to spend money on marketing.

In a strange way, I always saw these studies as very paradoxical. Rick Madden, who has done more to advance the art of radio in this country than any other single person, loved these studies that said that documentaries don't draw audiences – but he kept funding documentaries. Madden followed his heart, and what he knew – that documentaries are an integral part of public radio, of the public discourse in American life. In fact people want to hear documentaries. Look at the success of **Biography** and other shows on cable TV – they are not just part of the fabric – they are actually popular.

But the networks took a different stand. They pushed specials off into the corner – and use the studies as an excuse to lower payments to producers and to generally denigrate our work.

The Present Situation

The common wisdom now is that documentary production needs to be contained in already existing programming. The Holy Grail, of course is to get placed on **All Things Considered** or **Morning Edition**. Documentary pieces like those of **National Geographic Radio Expeditions** and the amazing **Lost & Found Sound** work perfectly in this setting. Slightly longer pieces are finding a home on **This American Life**. But there is still life for “stand alone” documentary work. David Isay continues his remarkable work – and even more remarkable, his string of “hits.” Last year's pre-election special on executions in Texas carried by NPR was perhaps one of the best-marketed pieces in recent public radio history. People listened. And it just won a Peabody Award. Some of PRI's most widely carried programs have been independently produced documentaries – **Spirits of the Present**, **The Miles Davis Radio Project**, **River of Song** and many others.

So why the dual message from the networks? They have had great successes, but continue to keep their distance from specials. My own experiences raise a case in point. Offers for my own multi-part series on great musicians have become less and less attractive. Most recently I shopped my upcoming 4-hour series on John Coltrane to NPR and PRI. Instead of a modest contribution to the production, and a more generous in-kind contribution to the marketing and promotion, the network position was very reserved. The offers included no production contribution, and I was asked to contribute marketing money myself. Now I was being asked to pay the networks for the privilege of having them distribute my work. Of course they didn't see it that way – they were happy to do the distribution; they only wanted money if I wanted marketing.

Economics

And what are the underlying economics? Can specials add anything directly to the networks? My hope has been that the networks could shop the programs around and use them to bring in national underwriters. This could work in the case of high profile specials like a major new series on John Coltrane, or one on Leonard Bernstein. It could also work with more specifically targeted shows

– an environmental documentary could appeal to a sports gear manufacturer, like REI or Eddie Bauer.

Is there any alternative? Yes. It occurred to me that my specials might find a better home at a station. The station could distribute the show nationally – getting the opportunity to do the fundraising, or at least to get put their own name and logo on the program. Will it work? I think so. I had discussions with 5 or 6 strong stations. Each one expressed interest in the idea. They saw the potential in going to their local market, or perhaps nationally, to bring in an underwriter. They were also interested in developing their own identities, faced with pressure from the satellite networks.

My final decision was to partner with WFMT. WFMT went on the air in Chicago almost 50 years ago, in December, 1951. Over the past nearly 50 years, they have built a strong record as a broadcaster and producer of high quality fine arts programming. WFMT's syndication arm, the WFMT Fine Arts Network (which includes the Beethoven Satellite Network and the Jazz Satellite Network) was established 30 years ago, and today syndicates, markets and produces numerous classical, jazz and other programs. AIR co-founder and longtime board member Steve Robinson, Vice President of WFMT and the WFMT Fine Arts Network, has been a longtime champion of documentaries and of independent production in general. The WFMT Fine Arts Network began distributing my 8-hour **Miles Davis Radio Project** just a few weeks ago, and already has placed it on 98 main channel stations, including 7 of the top 8 markets.

But the main point is that there are alternatives to the networks, and the more creative independents can become in exploring them, the stronger the entire system will become. I remain convinced that documentaries add great value to the system – both intellectual and economic. There will be a swing back – documentaries will come into vogue – and if those of us who produce them haven't been chased off to other pursuits, we'll see a renaissance in documentary production, funded by the CPB and major corporate underwriters, and distributed by independent stations and smaller networks, just like WFMT. By taking advantage of alternative sources for distribution, everyone will benefit. The list of choices will grow, and even small increases in competition for the best programs will increase offers and services.

Why Join AIR?

“I have been a member of no less than four journalist associations and unions. I join out of solidarity, the idea that by banding together we make ourselves stronger. But, with the exception of one group that provides car insurance discounts, only AIR offers real help for me as a professional journalist. I have gotten numerous jobs through listings in the AIR newsletter and have gotten wonderful help through the listserve. Viva AIR!”

Reese Ehrlich

An Invitation from the White House

By Steve Rathe

SRathe@aol.com

“During our eight years in the White House, one of the events we have looked forward to the most is the annual presentation of the National Medal of Arts and the National Humanities Medal. It has been a personal thrill for us to meet the authors whose books we have read, the performers and visual artists whose works have inspired us and the scholars whom we have admired.”

William Jefferson Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton 12/20/00

It’s not every day that one gets an invitation from the White House – even if it is by e-mail. NPR’s invitation was remarkably prosaic but almost giddy. The ceremony was just 48 hours away. “Join us for the presentation of the National Medal of Arts to NPR’s Cultural Programs and their producers. Please confirm that you will attend and provide your social security number to the White House.”

Having been carving out cultural programs for NPR and its stations since 1971, and with George W’s selection fresh in my consciousness, I figured it would be at least four years till this invitation was repeated. I rearranged my calendar and made reservations for my wife and myself on the late night train (figuring it was less likely than the air shuttle to be canceled for the impending snow).

Arriving at 2 a.m. and tumbling out of bed at 6:00 made us groggy, but the chill air of the Capitol Hill townhouse with no heat snapped us awake. I’d forgotten about getting a taxi in D.C. – I called at 6:45 for 7:30a.m. departure. “Sorry, Sir, How about 10 a.m.?” Fortunately, our host scraped the snow off the windshield of the Toyota and sped us across the District rush hour to join the shivering line at the White House gates for the 8 a.m. reception. But what a line! Ahead of us were Itzak Perlman, Toni Morrison, and retinues of smartly attired folks who looked more than a little familiar even if we couldn’t identify them all by name. A few feet away, an NPR staffer saw the diminutive ballet master Mikhail Baryshnikov shrugging off the cold as he waited to go through security, and quipped, “It’s OK, he’s Russian. He’s used to it.”

Actually, the reception wasn’t quite AT the White House. It was more like the White House Annex – a palatial canvas pavilion on the southeast corner of the grounds fitted with crystal chandeliers, gas heaters and smartly attentive military attaches.

It was an impressive crowd of recipients with whom we got to schmooze (in a waiting-for-the-President kind of way) – Claes Oldenburg, Benny Carter, Horton Foote, Quincy Jones, philanthropist Lewis Manilow and lots more. The tall silver coffee urns were attended by Marines in dress uniforms. (From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Juan Valdez, no doubt.) The attache assigned to each honoree gently restrained our urge to migrate across the room to hobnob with Barbra Streisand and Maya Angelou, lest we be out of place when the President and First Lady got to us.

Slowly the first couple made their way through the room, stopping to chat, congratulating each of us, and posing for a photo or three. Bill Clinton was taller than I expected. I’m 6’1”, and I was looking up to him. His handshake was wispy, though. (Perhaps the product of bone-crushing experience with exuberant fans.) Hillary’s shake was firm, and her gaze direct. “Congratulations. You’re doing important work.”

“Thank you, Senator.”

As soon as the reception was over, we were packed into tour buses for the five-minute drive to DAR Constitution Hall. There, in 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution had denied the magnificent Marion Anderson the right to sing in their auditorium because she was black. Instead she offered a concert that would make history – outdoors in front of the Lincoln Memorial.

Despite its ignominy, the stately hall greeted us with a multicultural serenade featuring D.C.’s United House of Prayer band (from the lively jazz/gospel begun by Cape Verdian “Daddy Grace”) and the Chicago Children’s Choir.

Moments later the President and Senator Clinton appeared onstage. Each of them took the rostrum to proclaim the importance of these arts and humanities honors, and their clearly genuine pleasure in being able to bestow them. Then the President took the medallions on long red sashes, one by one, and placed them over the heads of the recipients. It was great to hear Mr. Clinton speak. He was sharp, articulate and conversant with the work of almost all of the 24 Arts and Humanities honorees. And we could tell he was sincere about “waking up to Hillary’s radio blasting NPR” as he placed the medal on NPR President Kevin Klose.

Beyond the glow of the stars, the great pleasure of this national honor is that the public-radio system we collectively have built since 1971 will continue to bring the work of all the honorees – and their successors (many of you now reading this) to an increasingly fragmented nation. Public radio and its cultural programs may be no more than a thread, but it is a strong one that helps bind us together and share what I believe are our best values, and highest achievements.

There is only one medallion, and it will live at NPR Headquarters in Washington. But it was respectful and appreciated that NPR Cultural VP Murray Horwitz, Board Chair Jon Schwartz, and President Kevin Klose brought the independent and station producers of cultural programs including Fiona Ritchie (**Thistle and Shamrock**), Becca Pulliam and Branford Marsalis (of **JazzSet**), Shari Hutchinson (Marian McPartland’s **Piano Jazz**), Margaret Howze (**JazzProfiles**) and me (**Jazz from Lincoln Center** et al.) right up front with their staff producers including Tim Owens, Don Lee, Andy Trudeau, Ben Roe and others to share in the honors. I’m making a place on my wall for the photograph – and if you come to visit I’ve got a few more stories of the day.

The 2000 honorees for the National Medal of Arts were: Maya Angelou, Eddy Arnold, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Benny Carter, Chuck Close, Horton Foote, Lewis Manilow, NPR Cultural Programs, Claes Oldenburg, Itzak Perlman, Harold Prince, Barbra Streisand.

The Nation Humanities Medal went to: Robert N. Bellah, Will D. Campbell, (WGBH producer) Judy Crichton, David C. Driskell, Ernest J. Gaines, Herman T. Guerrero, Quincy Jones, Barbara Kingsolver, Edmund S. Morgan, Toni Morrison, Earl Shorris and Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve.

*Steve Rathe is president of Murray Street Enterprise and senior producer of **Jazz From Lincoln Center**. Rathe has created programs and specials heard on NPR since 1971, including **Folk Festival USA**, **Jazz Alive**, **American Music Sampler**, **RadioVisions** and **HEAT** with John Hockenberry. His productions have received three Peabody Awards, three Grammy nominations, the Prix Italia RAI Music Prize, The CPB and Ohio State awards and numerous other honors. Rathe is a founding member of AIR and former chairman of its board.*

Revised Code of Fair Practices for Working

Issued by Association of Independents in Radio (AIR)
and the Producers' Advocacy Group (PAG)

June 1999

Revised 1/23/01

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Independents in Radio* (AIR) and the Producers Advocacy Group** (PAG) present the following code in an effort to clarify and standardize rates and practices for working with freelancers in the public radio industry. In recognition of the central role freelancers and independent radio producers play in enriching the content of almost all the important programs on public radio, AIR and PAG recommend the following guidelines when public radio networks, stations or shows use the work of freelance radio producers:

LIVING WAGE

Freelance producers should be paid at a rate which allows a decent living. At minimum we urge acquirers to match the prevailing rate scale, including benefits, paid to staff reporters and producers doing comparable work in comparable markets. Prevailing rate scales for national acquirers should match those of national staff reporters/producers who are members of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA). We also recommend that acquirers keep in mind the additional cost of overhead borne by freelancers and set rates accordingly.

We encourage freelancers to negotiate, and regularly renegotiate, for the highest possible rate for themselves.

HOW STORIES ARE PAID

Whether paid by minute or by day, stories should be acquired at rates which reflect the amount of work that goes into making them, rather than simply the length of the final product. A fair and flexible fee structure should be agreed upon in advance. In cases where a very quick turn around is required a higher rate should be negotiated.

COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE

Freelance producers should receive cost of living increases. This should be reflected in the annual budgets of acquiring organizations.

CONSISTENCY WITHIN ACQUIRING ORGANIZATIONS

Freelancers should reasonably expect to be paid at the same rate (or progressively more) for each story that they complete for an acquirer, regardless of changes of editor.

TRANSPARENCY

Acquiring organizations should make rate structures and practices easily understood and available to freelancers. Guidelines covering rates and policies should be published, posted on websites, and sent to all freelancers yearly. Freelancers and editors should be kept current of all changes in policies and practices.

Public radio shows, networks and stations should have clear and consistent policies of advancement for freelancers which describe how freelancers progress within the organizations and what they must accomplish in order to receive higher rates.

PAYMENT PERIOD

All freelance work should be paid within 30 days of receipt of the finished product, prompted by an invoice from the reporter.

EXPENSES

Expenses for a piece should be agreed upon before a freelance producer begins work on a story. Networks, shows or stations should cover all expenses, including long distance phone calls, accommodation, travel, meals, admission fees and other costs which may be incurred in order to produce the story. Mileage is to be reimbursed at the current rate allowed by the Internal Revenue Service for mileage deductions. Expenses are to be paid within 30 days of receipt of a documented expense invoice.

KILL FEES

The story should be paid in full as long as the work agreed to is submitted on time, even in situations where the story is ultimately not aired. An exception to this would be if there are significant problems with tape quality which prevent the story from airing. If a story is killed mid-stream, the producer should be paid a fee which reflects the amount of work already expended on the story.

IDEAS AND PITCHES

An idea or pitch refers to both a subject and an angle or approach. A producer should be considered to have a proprietary right to ideas or pitches discussed with editors, and such ideas should be held in confidence. We highly discourage poaching and reassignment of ideas.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF REPORTERS

Freelancers have the responsibility to strive at all times for fairness and accuracy, and should be prepared to back up the "facts" asserted in a story with evidence. Editors, however, must respect any and all promises of confidentiality made by the producer in obtaining information.

Before accepting any assignment, it is the responsibility of the freelancer to reveal to the editor any actual or potential conflict of interest. This includes, but is not limited to, any financial interest relating to the subject matter of the story.

INDEMNITY

While it is the reporter's responsibility to back up the facts, no producer or reporter should be obliged to broadly indemnify a network or show against any claims or legal actions resulting from a radio story. Once a story is accepted and aired the broadcaster should stand by the producer if the story gives rise to legal action, except where a reporter has plagiarized or violated copyright law.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

If, during the course of work, the editor and freelance producer agree that a story requires time for research or tape gathering beyond the original expectation, the initial agreement on rates should be renegotiated.

EDITS

Except for an initial training period for inexperienced freelancers, we recommend that there be a maximum of three edits per story at the agreed upon rate. If a piece exceeds three edits, both the acquirer and the reporter should renegotiate the payment for that piece.

RIGHT OF REVIEW

After the final edit, any changes to a story that substantially alter meaning should only be made in consultation with the producer.

With Freelance Radio Producers

ON-THE-SHELF

First broadcast rights agreements are only guaranteed for 30 days following submission unless otherwise arranged. If a story hasn't been aired after 30 days, acquirers lose the right to first radio broadcast, and producers become free to resell the story elsewhere. The acquirer should state an anticipated broadcast date at the time of acceptance.

NOTIFICATION and ARCHIVAL COPIES

Whenever possible, freelance producers should receive advance notice of air dates and times. Producers should receive a courtesy copy of all pieces which are mixed by the acquiring organization.

CORRESPONDENCE

Acquirers' listener correspondence departments should make a best effort to maintain a database of all correspondence concerning work produced by freelancers, and should provide producers with copies of all mail and email correspondence received in response to the airing of their pieces. Freelancers should also hear about all feedback given by phone.

RECORDS

We recommend that acquiring organizations keep consistent records containing work and payment history for each producer. Records should detail agreements made with each producer concerning rates, rights, and conditions. Such records should be readily available to each editor who works with the producer.

RIGHTS

In general, rights agreements with freelance producers are for non-exclusive, one-time, United States radio broadcast only. All other rights, including webcast, electronic reproduction, transmission, or distribution of all, or part, of the story, are fully reserved by the producer unless negotiated separately. If additional rights are negotiated, they should be clearly stated in a contract and fees adjusted upwards.

WORK-FOR-HIRE

Freelancers, typically, should retain all rights to their work, except as in rights agreements negotiated separately. However, under some circumstances, freelancers may agree to "work-for-hire," in which case all rights are purchased by the acquirer; in these cases, fees should be negotiated upward to reflect the rights purchased.

USE OF CONTRACTS

Freelancers and acquiring institutions should sign a standard contract on a yearly basis which may be initiated either by the producer or the acquirer. The contract should specify payment schedule, expense and kill fee policies, payment for rewrites, and what rights are being purchased.

In addition, we recommend that freelancers and editors exchange a memo or confirmation letter for each assignment. This should describe the nature of the story, the rate to be paid for this story, expenses covered, due date, length of story, and any additional special circumstances which apply to that story only.

**AIR is a not-for-profit national membership organization offering information, networking, and other services to public radio producers.*

***PAG is an ad-hoc collective of national producers organized to support producer's rights.*

It is our intention to update this document on a periodic basis. We invite input from acquiring organizations.

©1999, 2001 by the Association of Independents in Radio and the Producers Advocacy Group.

NPR Diversity Initiative Offers Early Career Program for Producers

NPR's News and Human Resources divisions are pleased to announce the continuation of a professional development program known as the Diversity Initiative. Dedicated entry-level reporters and producers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds are invited to apply.

The Diversity Initiative has two main goals:

- to develop talented reporters/producers by enhancing their journalism, technical, and production skills;

- to diversify the voices, stories, and reporters heard in local, regional, and national programs on public radio stations nationwide.

If you work in a public radio newsroom or as an independent, this is an excellent opportunity to take the next step in your career. If you work in print, television, or commercial radio, this may be the chance you've been waiting for to make the transition to public radio. If you applied in the past and weren't accepted, you're welcome to apply again. Though we can't guarantee participants NPR jobs or air-time, this program will show you what it takes to get there.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The early-career program combines workshops, self-study, and reporting/producing assignments. Applicants must be able to devote considerable time to the program, starting this summer.

Participants will begin in June by developing focus statements for two story ideas. Assignments will be made by the end of June. Participants will do the research and interviews for their stories in July and write their stories in August, with a member of the NPR training staff as their editor.

Participants will bring their edited scripts and raw tape to NPR's headquarters in Washington, D.C., for a one-week tutorial in radio journalism and production from September 10-14, 2001. During this intensive, hands-on seminar, participants will produce the stories they worked on during the summer. They also will attend workshops led by NPR reporters, producers, editors, and engineers.

Following the seminar at NPR, participants will spend the rest of the training period at their home base, working on their own with guidance from the Diversity Initiative producer/trainer. This phase may include a working visit by the producer/trainer, during which she and the participant will collaborate on a project.

Depending on the availability of funds, the training period will conclude with a final project appropriate to each participant's skills, interests, and goals. Options may include a special assignment, a working visit to NPR, attendance at a professional conference, or being a mentor for an NPR-sponsored training project at a convention of one of the minority journalists associations.

The program ends with a comprehensive evaluation, including skills assessment and goals-setting for future work.

QUALIFICATIONS

A minimum of two years and no more than five years of daily news experience. Preference will be given to applicants with at least one year of experience in public radio.

A professional commitment to public radio journalism.

Applicants should have backgrounds and perspectives which are currently underrepresented among reporters/producers throughout the public radio system.

continued on Page 15

National Audio Theatre Festival Set for June

By Janet Dagley Dagley

AIRSPACE Editor

daeggadaegga@rcn.com

The "Show Me State" of Missouri may seem an unlikely mecca for audio drama – after all, how do you show someone something that can't be seen?

But for 19 years, some of the audio drama world's best and brightest gathered there for a week to celebrate their craft and share it with hundreds of others at the Midwest Radio Theatre Workshop.

MRTW's last workshop was held in 1999, but this June, many of the same audio-drama experts will once again converge in the tiny town of Fulton for an intense week of audio workshops culminating in a live broadcast, as the new National Audio Theatre Festival revives and expands on that tradition.

Like the previous Missouri workshop, NATF offers a weeklong working – and playing – vacation with a plethora of sessions on every aspect of audio theatre: sound effects, acting and voice development, writing, marketing, directing, casting, fundraising, marketing, production of both live and prerecorded programs, webcasting, digital editing, sampling, and even the effective use of silence.

NATF Executive Director Sue Zizza – who happens to be a well-respected sound-effects artist – took time out from her preparations not only for this summer's workshop, but her March wedding to fellow audio producer David Shinn, to talk to AIRSPACE about the festival and the contemporary world of audio drama.

Zizza: We've recreated some educational materials for those who are novices in the audio theater community, as well as those who want to further hone their skills. So currently we have a brand-new teaching text that includes materials from people like David Ossman (**Firesign Theatre**) and Yuri Rasovsky (**Hollywood Theatre of the Ear** and the Bradbury-award-winning **2000x**). It's got some historical material in it from people like Norman Corwin, but more importantly, it's got some brand new scripts in it that are coming from new writers, people like George Zarr and Andrew Joffe, for example.

This year at the conference, for example, we will be recording sessions on acting, and we will have people like Grammy-award-winner Jim Dale from the Harry Potter series as a teleconference guest, and we'll be recording all of his materials. But additionally, we'll have people like Lindsey Ellison from Boston, who is casting director for the Library of Congress audio book series. Additionally we'll have George Zarr, who's director of talk radio for Sirius Satellite. We will have Charlie Potter, who's another Grammy-award-winning audio-drama producer. He's also done a lot of stuff in the audio book community. So these people will be working together to present sessions on acting and casting and voiceover work and all that. And all of those sessions will be recorded.

Additionally this year we're going to record all of the sessions that have to do with marketing and distribution of materials. We're going to have the president of the Audio Publishers Association with us to talk for a time. We're going to have Rich Fish from the Lodestone Catalog – his is the longest-running catalog of specifically audio-theater materials. Tom Lopez from ZBS will be there to talk about some of his marketing. And myself and **The Radio Works**

series, which is 11 years old and heard on more than 60 stations both nationally and internationally.

At the end of the conference, during the summer, we'll be working to produce an educational tape set that will include the acting and marketing components. And then for next year we're planning, if all continues to go well, to record sessions on sound design and sessions on writing. So over the next four years, we hope that we will have a complete set of audio materials for people to listen to as reference materials, new materials that deal with the new technologies, that deal with new distribution issues, that deal with what's going on now in the audio-book community and in the actors community.

Over the last number of years, we have, because of the nature of the conference, tried to really focus on more high-end equipment. And the feedback we've gotten is that people can't afford all those fancy things. They want to see things that they themselves can really touch and use and afford, so this year, for example, one thing we're going to do very differently is use minidisc technology as spot playback effects as opposed to using something like a digital hard-drive-retrieve jukebox system. We're going to use equipment that anybody could, at the project-studio level, afford, and they'll get to see it in action.

Also one thing that's going to be different from past conferences is a whole session, a whole bunch of sessions, devoted to actually doing script development. Meaning we're going to take an idea from one of the script winners that wasn't quite polished yet, and through the work of Brian Price, who's going to be leading this, and George Zarr and some other writers, there'll be this real development opportunity, where people will get the chance to work a script through from its earlier draft all the way through to the end, so that by the time next year's conference comes, that script will be really polished to be produced.

Plus, one other thing we're going to be doing this year, we're asking participants who are interested in the audio-production end of things to submit five-minute tapes of their work that we can possibly use as transitional elements throughout the live performance, so those people will have the opportunity to have their work heard as part of the workshop as well.

We're really trying to make an effort to maintain what we know was good about the other events of this kind that we did, but also now to use the resources and the participants who are our board members to really take it to the next level, to be more than just a weeklong event, to really be a national organization that offers networking, ongoing education, ongoing access. We have a daily listserve that they can participate in; by going to our website they can contact our webmaster and ask to be part of the radio-drama list, where constant conversation goes on about what's going on in the audio theater community. We also have a directory of our members where they can find people in their own community who are producers or writers or actors, and soon we'll be able to even put up little samples that people would be able to hear.

This year's National Audio Theatre Festival workshop will be June 18-24. The early registration deadline, as well as the application deadline for scholarships (AIR members only) is April 30. The cost is \$340 before April 30; \$400 after. Nov. 15, 2001 is the deadline for the NATF script competition. More information is available at <http://www.natf.org>

The Plastic Economics of Audio Drama

By Brian Price

bprice@brookings.net

Hello from the Territory of South Dakota.

Our motto is, "When the mud comes, eventually so will spring." It's something to live by.

My name is Brian Price. I'm a journeyman writer/producer in this little niche of ours. My work has been produced and performed by, among others, Garrison Keillor, David Ossman of the **Firesign Theatre** and Dan Coffey-aka, **Dr. Science**. In 1995 Jerry Stearns and I formed Great Northern Audio Theatre Productions. We have written and produced **Tumbleweed Roundup**, **Permafrost, MN** and many other shows including the live performances celebrating the annual Mark Time Audio Science Fiction Awards. I'm a founding member and secretary of the National Audio Theatre Festivals, Inc.

Recently, Yuri Rasovsky issued a survey of readers of the radio-drama listserve. He asked radio-drama producers which professional organizations and guilds they belonged to or made use of. He asked how we distributed our material and whether we were compensated and in turn how did we compensate others. Basically, he asked if we were getting paid.

Yuri's little survey was pretty much a rhetorical survey. I mean, I don't think he was really doing a statistical analysis of radio-theater producers – he was bringing up a couple of important questions, both of which have to do with legitimacy.

The Mark Time Awards

By Jerry Stearns

jstearns@mtn.net

"The best special effects are the ones inside your head. The best aliens are the ones that only you can see, and you only see them in your own mind. [Science fiction is] one of the largest genres in the whole world of audio publishing anyway, mostly because people love to listen to it."

– David Ossman, 1997 Mark Time Award ceremony

David Ossman, Richard Fish and I created the Mark Time Award in conjunction with Minicon, the Minnesota Science Fiction Society's annual convention for 1997. The convention had sponsored a live radio show since 1981, and felt the award was a logical move. Tom Lopez of ZBS was the first presenter. In 1999 we added the Ogle Award for Fantasy/Horror audio productions. Each year we give a Gold and Silver award in each genre, and have given Lifetime Achievement Awards to Douglas Adams, Tom Lopez and Yuri Rasovsky.

There are other awards that honor radio programs, and most of them have a drama category. But the Mark Time/Ogle Awards are the only awards given in this country that are solely for audio theater. We have only promoted the awards on the Internet so far, but we hope to keep spreading the word and getting more entries and larger audiences as we go.

Now in our fifth year, the 2001 awards will be announced July 6 at CONvergence, the convention of the Minnesota Society for Interest in Science Fiction and Fantasy (MISFITS), in Bloomington, MN. Find out more at

<http://www.greatnorthernaudio.com/MarkTime.html>.

First of all, is radio theater considered a legitimate art form? Audio art seems to fall between the cracks of the recording, publishing, and broadcast industries. In the United States less than a dozen people, maybe less than a half-dozen people, make their livings by solely producing radio theater. So, if being professional (getting paid) is a sign of an art form – we're not very legitimate (again, I'm talking about the U.S.).

The second question is – do we treat ourselves, our colleagues, and the art form legitimately (professionally)? The quick answer for most of us who don't pay actors union scale, etc., is that we can't afford to. Jerry Stearns and I looked into being a union shop one time – the dues and hoops were out of proportion for our needs. We do 3 to 4 productions a year – that's about all the money we can afford to lose. So, we pay when we can. We give presents and send flowers and we definitely try to give a more positive experience to actors than a lot of stage or voice-over work provides. I take my own work, even if it's a comedy, seriously. But, Yuri's broader overall point is well taken – if we're not acting like we're an industry, are we just playing around? Is radio theater just a hobby? I don't know.

Historically, I think radio theater is filling a niche that small-press magazines provided back in the late 60s and early 70s. If the New Yorker ain't buying your material – get it out there yourself and hand out your poems on a street corner (which brings up, once again, the big never-ending problem of distribution). You take control of the production and the product. Of course, that becomes an awesome scattered responsibility (I had a nasty incident with a CD label maker just the other day). When you've put the whole sheebang together – the results are all your fault.

I appreciated what Tom Fuller said in an earlier listserve, "I write radio drama because I find it to be the most plastic and economical mass media available." That's about it, isn't it? I don't know why more artists don't dab in audio theater – you can write and produce radio theater for a fraction of the cost of a film or TV. Cool. A slacker's dream.

Oooops. Of course, the dirty little secret of good audio drama is that it's not a slacker's art. It is very difficult to produce a truly good piece of radio drama. Writing a good script is a major challenge. I'd say it is as hard as writing a really fine short story. You just don't hear many good ones nowadays. Maybe you never did.

Radio theater, in the end, is a collaborative medium. You need good writing, good acting, good talent all the way around to make it work, to make it worthwhile. So, maybe that's the overall point – radio theater doesn't have (or no longer has) the economy or structure or audience to bring the best talent together all at once. I don't know if a guild or actors' union would help the situation, but I do know that we need to get together in some form and get better at the art and the craft of radio theater. Maybe that's what a listserve is for.

We haven't done our best work. I know I haven't. So, think harder. Do another rewrite. And go out kick some butt.

That's my personal "state of the radio" address.

Expanded from a post to the radio-drama e-mail list. To subscribe, send mail with SUBSCRIBE in the subject line to radiodrama-request@lofcom.com

Breaking News: What We Can Learn from

By Dale Willman

willman@glrc.org

Dale Willman is the Managing Editor for the Great Lakes Radio Consortium, a weekly feed of environmental news stories to public-radio stations across the country. He has spent the past 26 years in broadcasting. His career began at a small commercial station in Ohio. He has also worked at public station WOSU in Columbus, hosted for Monitor Radio in Boston and worked for almost 15 years at the network level in Washington, D.C. The views expressed in this article, however, are Dale's entirely, and do not represent the views of his employer.

For more than two decades, I have been fortunate to have a career that has spanned both sides of the tracks – commercial and public broadcasting. In addition to about 10 years with NPR, I've served as a correspondent with CBS and CNN, as well as worked at commercial stations such as WCBS in New York. I call this fortunate, because over that time I have learned that both commercial and public broadcasting have a great deal to offer each other. Many public broadcasters, however, seem to scoff at this. They view their commercial colleagues with at best, indifference, and at the worst, contempt.

This attitude should change, however, in at least one area – that of crisis coverage. For years, radio was the medium the public overwhelmingly turned to for breaking news. With the advent of cable news, we gave up that title. Yet radio is immediate, and can take the listener places TV can never hope to go. And, it's easily transportable. So it's time we won back the breaking-news mantle. But we cannot do that unless we learn from our commercial brethren. (Let me say just parenthetically that we're not talking here about coverage of every car wreck and minor hostage situation. What I mean in this context is major breaking news, on the scale of a Columbine, or Oklahoma City tornadoes. Leave the crap news to the commercial side).

Over the years, I've spent a great deal of time producing, reporting and anchoring special-events coverage, including breaking news. Much of this work has been on the commercial side, because unlike public broadcasting, commercial broadcasters take breaking-news coverage seriously. To commercial broadcasters, breaking news involves the use of fly-away satellite uplinks, phone drops, last-minute ISDN installations, live cell-phone reports, interviews on the fly and much more. They recognize the importance of immediacy – so they use the tools necessary to get the news back right away. There is a place for the pensive, step-back view public radio does so well. But if we want listeners to keep their radios tuned to our station when breaking news occurs, there is also a need for more immediate coverage, in addition to rather than separate from the later analysis.

First, let me provide a few examples of problems I have seen over the years with events-based coverage in public radio. While these examples involve NPR, many could just as easily have occurred at your station: While newscasting at NPR on a Saturday long ago, we were told a reporter, who had just covered a four-hour news conference, couldn't file a news spot because he had a two minute piece in the show, which was 4 hours away. Cultural difference? A commercial reporter would have filed two set-up

spots before the conference, run outside to file a spot 10 minutes into the news conference, and written three more spots during the conference to file immediately when it ended; they'd still have four hours to write a long piece. NPR approach? Coddle the reporter, letting them know that the fast filing of spot news is a waste of time. The real answer? Something in-between: don't do what the commercial guys do; but SOMEWHERE in FOUR HOURS of talking heads, a reporter MUST be able to write a couple of spots they can file right afterward, even voicers.

Another example, from that same case – we don't seem to believe in voicers in public radio. We can't do a spot unless we have tape. That reporter could have easily written two voicers to keep the newscasters happy. The commercial attitude – a voicer from the scene, if that's all time will permit, is still better than copy from a newscaster – is I think the correct answer.

Some major event was breaking once while newscasting. Five minutes before air, we transferred a caller who was on scene to the studio. I was going to do a live two-way in the first half of the cast. The NPR engineer initially refused to bring the caller up on the board, saying "We don't do live here."

While that was 10 years ago, and it's no longer a problem at NPR, I think that attitude remains at some stations. If you're covering breaking news, it doesn't wait to get something in the can. By then, it's all changed. Live is often the best way to capture what's really happening.

So what do examples such as this tell us? Here are a few of my own admittedly biased observations:

We're audio snobs. I've met many public-radio engineers who refuse to allow cell phones on the air because the audio isn't "clean" enough. Leave alone for a moment the discussion of the quality provided by digital technology. Breaking news isn't pretty. Commercial radio has found listeners will forgive them their audio sins during breaking news, because they want the information any way they can get it. This doesn't mean ignore quality; simply don't let it become an impediment to information flow.

We're sometimes arrogant. I produced for NPR at Columbine. Some in management were not pleased with what we accomplished. I asked that we hold a post-mortem, so those back at the network could understand what we in the field were dealing with, and we all could learn how to do it better next time. All those requests were refused. Not one person in management at NPR EVER asked me how we could do things better next time. Not only did they disrespect my many years of producing such events, they actually believed they knew better how to run things sitting in their offices than we did on the ground, even though most if not all of them have never been involved in a live radio event in their lives.

For instance, a quick look at how we produced much of our news there – a couple of the correspondents ordered a phone line for the parking lot near the school where the media gathered. Each morning, I would drive my car to that phone line, and run it through the back window (it was a standard twisted pair with an RJ-11 connection, for those who understand these things). I had a converter box purchased at Radio Shack plugged into the cigarette lighter, so we could run the Hotline box, which required AC power. The phone line was plugged into the Hotline, we dialed Washington, and Howard Berkes did his live shots sitting in the passenger seat of

Our Counterparts in Commercial Radio

my car, while I sometimes turned pages of his script for him. Was it pretty? No. Was it compelling radio? Absolutely. Can most public stations pull that off? Right now, probably not. Did management understand what was going on, or care to know the technical difficulties we faced covering this story? No.

We also look down on technical knowledge. I would wager that few in public radio even know power converters such as the one I just described exist, yet they're great devices for running some AC-powered equipment in a pinch, such as your laptop. Raise your hand if you know how to wire a twisted-pair phone line at a female RJ-11 junction box. I don't see many hands in the air. Technical knowledge is not only important, it's imperative for our people in the field. They **MUST** understand some technical issues, because that knowledge can make the difference between making it to air and not. In public radio though, we too often see this as beneath us, because we're "artists." Here's a quick technical tip: if your equipment isn't working, turn it off, let it sit for 30 seconds, then turn it back on. Half the time, that will solve the problem. Why? Electronics have become more and more complex, with many relays and other devices that can electronically stick or jam. Shutting everything off will allow them to reset to their default status, often curing the problem. Do I have an engineering background? No. Is one needed for efforts like that? Of course not, anyone can learn to do it. This is just one of many tricks I've learned from commercial engineers.

Now, a few quick comments on what you can do to help prepare for that next big event:

- Don't just gather contact numbers and put out a big list that goes in someone's kit. Laminate the most important numbers on a wallet-sized card and make sure every reporter has one to carry with them. That way, they can make calls to check something out even if they don't have their equipment with them. Sometimes you can even get real stories that way.

- Many cell phones, if not all, now have data ports. My old CNN phone in D.C. actually had an adaptor with a mini-plug, so I could play tape directly into the phone. Check with your cell provider; they may have a similar rig for your phones. You can even get adapters to run your computer into the new digital phones. Record your reports on the computer, edit them, then file them by FTP back to your station. Eric Westervelt does that, and so can you.

- Don't frown on pagers. Every station should now have one pager that has e-mail capability in the emergency kit. While at CNN, I was one of the first reporters to be on-scene when the Capitol Hill shootings occurred a few years back. When I got there, no one knew anything, and the police were threatening to arrest reporters – I almost got arrested for defending a colleague they tried to haul away. This was one of those situations where those at the network actually had a better idea of what was going on than I did, because they were working the phones. But I had an advantage over my colleagues – a pager to which my producer could send long e-mails. He began cutting and pasting wire copy, and he also e-mailed details gleaned from phone conversations. So not only did I have the information I was finding out myself at the scene, the additional material – name of the shooter, his background, other details – were literally at my fingertips. Other reporters on-scene were asking me

what was going on. I did probably 60 live shots (imagine THAT in public radio) with stations and the network over a three or four hour period, and much of the material I used came from my pager. Be creative – equipment can sometimes be a major help in your coverage. (Our pager could also send messages, which came in handy when you were already using your cell phone)

- USE POST-MORTEMs. Our rule at CBS was "Get it on the air any way you can, then talk about it later to figure out how to do it better the next time." We always seem to be too busy for this, yet it can be a massive time saver the next time an event occurs. Remember to respect those who were in the field, because the difficulties they encounter, and the things they learned to get around them, are valuable.

- Try de-briefing on-air. It's a wonderful way to quickly get your reporter on the air, and the listener gets the insight provided by someone who has been/is on the scene. So what if they don't have time to roll in tape? It's breaking news – go with your strengths, and one of those strengths is your reporter's knowledge.

Those are just a few of the things I've learned along the way. I hope at the very least this provides fodder for discussion in your newsroom. Remember – I'm not advocating that we begin covering celebrity weddings. However, when it comes to breaking news, we have a lot to learn. So let's learn it from those who do it well – our friends in commercial broadcasting.

CD DUPLICATION SERVICES

Specializing in Short
Run Data and Audio Jobs

ECONOMICAL AND FAST

No need to break the bank for just a few. We will provide one or a bunch at reasonable prices and are ready to work with you into the future..

Call, fax or e-mail for a quote

We also offer audio CD recording and mastering services,
Web hosting, web design, server co-location,
national dial-up and electronic hardware sales and leasing.

EMR Data Services, Inc
A Full Service ISP
22402 N. 19th Avenue - Phoenix, AZ 85027
Contact: www.emrcorp.net
e-mail: cd@emrcorp.net
tel: 800-851-8535 - 623-581-0842
fax: 623-582-9499

Producer Profile: Susan Morris In Pittsburgh

I have a problem! Actually, two of us have a problem.

There are two people in public radio (and AIR) with the name of Susan Morris. It's inconvenient to share your name with someone else, especially when the other person is in the same profession!

I'm sure the other Susan Morris will check in with her story; in the meantime, let me tell you about me, the Susan Morris in Pittsburgh, and what I do.

In 1984, when I was working at WDUQ-FM, the steel industry in Pittsburgh was collapsing and thousands of people were being laid off. That year during the Easter service at my church, union activists stormed into the sanctuary and started yelling at the congregation for their indifference to the workers' plight.

I couldn't resist. I left church, rushed home and came back with my tape recorder. The tape I gathered from that church service was the centerpiece of my first story for NPR. For the next year I covered the steel story for NPR.

Being thrown into the middle of a national story was thrilling but scary. The best part was chasing the story, filing the report, and – best yet – hearing Bob Edwards announce my name on **Morning Edition**.

Much less fun was dealing with tight deadlines and demanding NPR editors. In a perfect world I would have been a more experienced reporter but the fact is, I had been in radio only a short time, working briefly at KPFA-FM, KZSU-FM at Stanford University and WDUQ-FM. My liberal arts education and perseverance along with several stints at NPR and Western Public Radio training workshops helped me through a painful initiation period.

By 1986 I was operating from my own studio, filing news stories and features with NPR, Voice of America, Monitor Radio, Mutual

News and the CBC. I also did stories for WDUQ-FM and WQED-FM.

Being an instant expert on new and breaking stories eventually got wearing. Inspired by other freelance producers, I started producing sound portraits for **All Things Considered** and documentaries for NPR's **Horizons**, many of which won awards. My most fun project was working with actress Julie Harris on my radio docudrama.

I also taught broadcast writing at the University of Pittsburgh and for three years hosted a local television show on women's health issues.

In 1995 I shifted gears and took time off to study the stock market. (Studying ways to make money had become more appealing that haggling with NPR editors over fees and reimbursements of expenses!)

I came up with an idea for a radio series on the stock market which a local brokerage firm agreed to fund. **Stock Talk**, 90-second segments on the market, is now in its 4th year and starting in January, it will air daily on three radio stations in Pittsburgh. I also have an online column on investing at <http://www.emoneydigest.com>.

I've covered a lot of ground since 1984. Some things haven't changed; I still don't perform well under excruciating deadlines, and I prefer working alone on my own projects. And I'm sure the future holds even more adventures.

See you on the radio!

This is Susan Morris in Pittsburgh.

AIR Health Plan

AIR members are eligible to join U.S. Healthcare/Aetna at group rates, which offers both individual and family health plans. Their nationwide coverage includes:



- Full Hospitalization
- Maternity
- Mental & Nervous Conditions
- Full Dental Care
- Prescription Drugs
- Vision Testing
- \$25,000 Term Life Policy



No one is rejected for any reason. No health exams or questionnaire is required.

For further information call
AIR Benefits Coordinator Beth Tani at
(888) 499-4669

If you are a new AIR member be sure to let the AIR Membership Committee know if you do not receive a Health Care information package.

Announcing The HHB PortaDisc

The HHB PortaDisc is a premier mini-disc recorder at an affordable price.



Perfect for station based journalists and independent producers.

Features Include: high quality mic pre amps, rugged professional mechanism, phantom power, limiters, uses AA batteries, NiMH or regular, and is the first ever field recorder with a USB port, so it can import files directly into the computer.

Call for prices on Roland and the complete HHB product line.

Steve Rowland
800-469-9427 or

e-mail: Steve_Rowland@msn.com
Visa and Mastercard accepted

New Distribution Services for Public Radio

By Linda Dominic

NPR Distribution

ldominic@npr.org

NPR Distribution is in the midst of developing options for the next generation of system infrastructure and distribution services for public radio. The primary focus of this work is a new core service model for public radio program delivery, nicknamed the "Content Depot."

The Content Depot is a digital asset management system which would expand the current real-time transmission functions of the PRSS to include many new services for public radio. The Content Depot would function as a virtual warehouse and fulfillment center, where programs and other content could be transmitted or deposited once and retrieved many times, in a variety of formats. Potential new services include:

- distributed storage of programming and metadata
- store & forward capability (in addition to real-time transmission)
- support for multiple platforms and protocols
- insertion of local content into program streams
- tools to assist in tracking of program carriage by stations
- archiving of content
- increased automation of scheduling and retrieval functions

The transition from the present distribution system to a full-blown Content Depot structure would entail a transformation in the role of the PRSS – from its current focus as a one-way program transport pipeline, to a fully integrated, interactive transmission, storage, and communications matrix. Feedback from system users so far indicates that such a structure would better serve the needs of stations and program distributors in the changing environment of public radio.

NPR Diversity Initiative: Deadline April 27

continued from Page 9

Applicants must be available June-August to gather material and write stories for the September seminar at NPR.

Applicants employed by an organization are required to secure the support and permission of their immediate supervisor and manager, to ensure their full participation in the program.

Participants need access to broadcast-quality recording equipment for the duration of the training.

There is no charge for participation. The program covers the cost of participants' travel to Washington, DC, for the September seminar. Hotel costs are also covered. (Participants are responsible for meals and other expenses while in Washington, DC.)

TO APPLY

APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 2001. Materials received after that date will not be considered.

Any missing items may disqualify you from consideration.

Please submit the following materials unfolded in a 9x12 envelope:

1. A brief description of your current duties, assignments, or projects.
2. A current resume with the names of two references.
3. A 250-word essay explaining what you would bring to the Diversity Initiative, and what you hope to gain from it.
4. A written analysis (no more than two pages) of one hour of either NPR's Morning Edition or All Things Considered. Include your assessment of story selection/order/treatment, and of overall program 'flow.' Also choose one story to analyze in-depth; discuss its strengths and weaknesses.
5. A letter of recommendation and support from your station manager if you are a staff member of a public radio station, or an independent producer

Once an implementation decision is made, the Content Depot would be brought online in stages, over a two- to three-year period. Its final configuration would be determined by customer demand, and by further evolution of the technologies and public radio.

Distribution is also exploring options for providing a new service called the "Internet Edge," which could assist stations and producers in streaming content to listeners. The concept involves using satellite capacity to stream audio signals and other content to servers close to end users, thus bypassing much of the congestion and quality degradation associated with rich media transmission on the Internet.

Distribution is seeking opportunities for public radio to secure an arrangement with an existing provider who has infrastructure in place for providing this "edge" service. The hope is that public radio might be able to strike a deal with one of these providers for aggregate service which would be more cost-effective than individual distributor charges for streaming.

NPR Distribution has been discussing the new service models at recent public radio meetings, and is actively seeking comment and input from stations, networks, and independent producers. A Design Advisory Group of station staff and program suppliers is working with NPR staff to identify functional requirements for the future system. The PRSS will have space in the Exhibit Hall at the PRC in Seattle, May 16-19, and you are invited to stop by for demonstrations and discussion with the staff and members of the advisory group.

Meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments about this ongoing work, please feel free to call Marty Bloss, Technology Director (202-513-2676), or Linda Dominic, Director of Planning & Communications (202-513-2675) at NPR Distribution.

affiliated with a station. For others, a letter of recommendation from a professional colleague who knows your work.

6. A cassette, DAT (44.1 or 48khz), or mini-disc sample of your work, not to exceed 10 minutes. Can include hard news, features, commentaries, interviews, etc. Include a written description of the contents and your role in each production. May also submit videotape (1/2 VHS) or print clips. Tapes will not be returned.

7. The application form, available from mmelnicove@npr.org.

The Diversity Initiative is administered by the Training Unit of NPR's News Division, with support from NPR's Human Resources Division. The DI producer/trainer is Margo Melnicove, a longtime public radio reporter, producer, editor, and news manager. Margo began her broadcasting career in Alaska, as a volunteer at KRBD-FM in Ketchikan. She has also worked at KTOO-FM & TV in Juneau; WBUR-FM, WGBH-FM, and Monitor Radio in Boston; contributed to NPR, Marketplace, and other national programs; and won numerous awards. She teaches broadcast journalism, print journalism, and public speaking at the college level. She has taught at Boston University, Brandeis University, Emerson College, and Simmons College.

Send application form and supporting materials to:

Margo Melnicove
245 Lake Shore Drive
Wayland, MA 01778

Any questions - phone/fax (202)513-2959 or e-mail mmelnicove@npr.org



328 Flatbush Ave., #322
Brooklyn, NY 11238 USA
Tel: (888) YES-AIR7
Fax: (718) 857-3376

Address Service Requested

Spring 2001

A I R S P A C E

Stay Tuned For . . .

Robin White of Radio College
Local Stations Offer New Opportunities
Producer Profile



and much more in the Summer Issue

AIR's activities are supported by individual and organizational members, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.