



Lynn Tousey watches while WDET Production Manager John Patouhas adjusts her microphone to eliminate "pops" and help create a sound that makes listeners feel they are in the room during Public Radio Collective radio dramas.

photos by SHARON LAH/EUK/staff photographer

Radio: A drama of the mind

By Anehd Derbabian
special writer

Radio theater. It blossoms on the airwaves in vivid color. But dare we use our minds and our imagination to explore such a brilliant world? Can we be lured to invent again... imagine again... dream again?

Yes, according to the Public Radio Collective, a WDET volunteer radio theater production company, PRC has been delivering radio theater to listeners' doorsteps with meticulous ingenuity since 1979. John Patouhas, PRC director and one of the founders, remembers when he and partners Bill Hale and Vicki Lange first established the collective.

"It was like venturing into a swamp," he said. "We weren't sure if we were going to fall into the water or if it was just going to be up to our ankles. We took it step by step, one day at a time."

Radio theater was popular up to the early 1950s and slowly faded out with the advent of television.

Television, according to Patouhas, forces the viewer to accept what's on the screen. Radio drama, on the other hand, "gives you the basics — the dialogue and sound effects — you have to do it on your own. It's not all laid out for you."

One listener may visualize the main character in a crisp, clean outfit; another may imagine a dirty tattered garment. However, small or large the detail, each person imagines it differently, Patouhas said.

"Everybody paints a different picture," he said. "That's what radio drama is all about. Radio drama is marvelous for young people. Television removes their imagination."

BETWEEN 25-30 volunteers, including the actors and actresses, technicians, directors, writers and production assistants, work on each production. What comes first in the radio drama is production, with Patouhas "trying to find the best for everyone."

"We can work for four hours on a one-minute scene," he said, praising his production crews. "We all respect and learn from each other."

WDET radio strongly supports the work of PRC and its productions, Patouhas said, adding that general manager Caryn Mathes is "responsible for the life of radio drama" at WDET.

When it comes to radio theater, PRC uses all of WDET's resources from public relations to



WDET production manager John Patouhas (standing) discusses microphone placement with production assistant Shawn Fox.



Director Rebecca Haney monitors the rehearsals for a WDET radio drama.

the station's sound and editing equipment. PRC works with compact discs rather than records, since hearing a scratch during a broadcast can "ruin the illusion." And it's the illusion that helps create successful radio theater, Patouhas said. "Sound effects and dialogue don't have to be balanced," he said. "But how they merge with each other is important."

"THE SOUND effects are going to paint the mental picture of where the actors are," added Anthony Hamilton, a professional screen actor and voice-over artist.

Patouhas' humble nature and push for the best possible productions transmit to those around him. As he sees it, "if you're going to work on a radio drama production, it's for the love of a lost art form, not ego. It's just a lot of fun."

PRC began by performing the classics — "A Christmas Carol," "Treasure Island" and "Titanic" were among the time-honored favorites that graced the airwaves. "Atlantis: The Beginning" was interesting PRC production in that it included high-tech alien sounds as well as some more common ones — pig, lamb and billygoat sounds.

Hamilton has appeared in several PRC productions. He and his wife, Fiona Berisford, both worked on the "Titanic" production. Hamilton got the part of the captain and Berisford played an Irish maid.

PRC brought radio drama back to Detroit, Hamilton said. "It was brought up with radio drama; it was all we had. But it was slowly becoming a lost art."

Scripts addressing contemporary issues are beginning to take focus at PRC. The classics will always be a part of the productions, but the collective has decided to move forward, Patouhas said.

"WE'RE OPENING the door to a new avenue because we need to progress," he said.

To do that, PRC began utilizing original scripts a few years ago. A script competition turned up three winners whose topics included a mystery, a comedy and science fiction. PRC packaged the three scripts into one-hour micro-dramas for presentation.

The collective also held another script competition for young people. The winner was chosen from an age range of six to 16 years.

"For them, it was like a dream," Patouhas said. "The success of radio theater is largely dependent on original scripts with imagination. That's the key."

PRC's newest production is "Whale Music," which will air this month. It's a joint English-American production. According to Patouhas, England is known for its radio drama facilities. A case in point was recording a scene that took place next to pond. The English production team actually went to the pond.

And Patouhas plans to pursue similar joint productions with other countries to continue producing "inventive" productions.

PATOUHAS DELIGHTS in the community involvement in radio theater. Restaurants and food companies provide meals for the cast and crew during tapings and rehearsals, and people often drop in to help with anything that needs to be done, he said.

Such support is helpful, since each production takes three to four months to complete, he added.

Hamilton enjoys working on the productions and welcomes input from the listening audience. He wants to know what people think of the productions.

"It's just sort of a funny thing," he said. "One feels that they're (the actors) doing it in a sort of void."

In addition to his work with PRC, Patouhas also conducts seminars at radio stations on how to start a radio theater company. He also attends workshops and seminars to learn more about the art form.

"You'd be surprised how many people love radio drama," he said. "We want to bring back that lost art. Yes, there's television, but there's also radio drama."

And the winner is . . .



The envelope, please . . .

The hoopla is over with. Hollywood's big night is a fading memory. And if anything, it was memorable for Oscar's show of independence. The amount of money earned at the box office wasn't as big a criteria for nominations as in previous years and what some might call artistic films won their just due this year.

Granted, the odds-on favorite for best movie, "Driving Miss Daisy," won, but it didn't walk away with a truckload of statuettes. And the Irish-made "My Left Foot," the story of paralyzed artist Christy Brown, won two major awards for best actor and best supporting actress.

Well, there's still one envelope left to open. The one with the name of the winner of a trip for two to Hollywood, the grand prize in the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers-AMC Theaters Oscar contest.

Like the Oscars, this year's contest was full of surprises.

After counting 40,000 entries and getting the results for the six categories — best actor, actress, movie, supporting actor and actress and director — it turned out that four had the correct answers.

And considering that anyone seeing a movie at an AMC theater can enter, it was a pleasant surprise to find out that those four lucky people were from the Observer & Eccentric readership area.

With four correct entries and no Price Waterhouse around to sort it all out, the judges resorted to the tried and true method of coming up with the grand prize winner — toss 'em in a hat and draw.

That worked, but there was a slight problem. The grand prize winner, it was discovered, was 15, a few years shy of 18, the minimum age for entering.

By default the prize reverted to the second choice, but wonder of wonders, that perfect prognosticator also turned out to be under age. Well, that left just two entrants, who luckily met all the requirements. And so, without further ado, the grand prize winner is Scott Pollack of Livonia.

Pollack will wing his way to sunny southern California with a guest via Northwest Airlines for a six-night stay at the Pacifica Hotel in Los Angeles, arranged by Your Mans Tour. The trip includes use of a Budget Rent-A-Car while in L.A.

Walking away with the second-place prize of an AMC gold pass was Carol Hlerogard of Birmingham.

And now Oscars 1990 is truly over.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Carmen Allen of Southfield helps operate "reggae night" on Fridays at Pullum's along with fellow Southfield resident Barry Williams.

Reggae, rum at Pullum's

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Patrons come from all over, including the suburbs and Canada to listen to the bass heavy beat provided by such groups as King David, Diamond, Tropical Connection and Sugar Minot. Pullum said crowds average 200 to 250 on Fridays, below the 600 the club can hold for big shows.

"IT'S BEEN building slowly," said Pullum, who owns the nightclub with his wife, Annie. "A lot of Americans are not familiar with (reggae). People from the Islands are familiar with it and come down."

Reggae has an identity problem. A lack of radio support is a main obstacle. So is the lack of venues in the area offering the Caribbean music.

Other clubs have reggae nights. Most often, though, it's relegated to off-nights such as Tuesday and Wednesday. Pullum's Place is the only establishment that has it on Fridays.

Though both Rolling Stone and Spin magazines have predicted reggae to be the break out sound of the 1990s.

Such nuggets of optimism give local groups like Universal Spectrum hope. The group is one of only a handful in the reggae outfits area.

Pullum's Place is at 6001 Woodward in Detroit. In addition to reggae night on Fridays, the club offers jazz and rhythm & blues on Saturdays and gospel on Sundays. For information, call 831-4183.



Ann Marie D'Anna (left) and Lisa Uguccioni rehearse lines for the radio drama "Whale Music," produced recently by the Detroit Public Radio Collective.