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Writing a radio play

Here are some hints and tips for writing radio drama, showing some of the similarities and differences between radio and stage drama.

Define audience

As a writer you need to decide who your audience will be and what your intention is. For example do you want to:

- make your audience laugh?
- comment on a current or historical event?
- tell a story?
- convey a message?

When you have decided on these things you are ready to begin planning the ingredients for your script which are the elements of drama.

Elements of radio drama

The elements of drama are its basic building blocks. The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum defines the elements of drama as the the 'key ingredients' of drama. The elements of radio drama are the same as those of stage drama:

- role: characters in the play
- time: when the action takes place
- place: where the action takes place
- action: what happens in the drama
- tension: conflict within and between characters and their environment
- focus: the ideas, feelings, or characters that the playwright wants us to concentrate on in a particular moment.

However in radio drama the playwright needs to let us know about the elements through different means as we cannot get information through our eyes. Radio drama is essentially heard, not seen.

Writing a radio play is about painting a picture with words and sounds. It is quite different from writing for stage production and some of these differences are outlined below.

Character

A radio play generally has fewer characters than a staged play. This partly because it is easy for an audience to forget who characters are if they do not speak frequently as they cannot be seen on stage, and partly because it can difficult for an audience to

distinguish between a number of characters by voice alone. The audience learns about the characters through what they say and what others say about them, and the sound of their voice. Characters have to have distinctive voices.

The audience needs to be able to tell one character from another. The character's voice needs to tell us a range of information about the character, for instance their age, ethnicity, social background and what they think and feel about the events in the play.

All good drama makes a connection with its audience. This can be achieved with a sympathetic character or by using a situation that is familiar to the audience.

Dialogue

What characters say is essential in a radio play. As well as telling us what a character thinks and feels, dialogue must tell us where we are, what the characters are doing, and how the characters are reacting to what is happening around them. For example a character might say "Look out! He's got a gun" where there would be no such line in a stage play as the audience could see for themselves that a particular character had a gun.

Dialogue is essential to define sounds heard in a radio play. A listener might interpret a sound in a number of different ways, unless there is dialogue from the characters to set the scene. For example the sound of an engine could be interpreted by the listener as either the sound of a small car, a van, a small truck, a bus, or a Rolls Royce unless the dialogue makes the image suggested by the sound clear to the listener.

Writing dialogue for a script is different from writing prose. The words need to sound the way people speak. For this reason it is a good idea to say the words as you write them so that you can hear what they sound like. Spoken sentences are often shorter than written ones and may be fragmented – people don't always plan ahead when they are speaking so strings of thoughts may not be as well organised in a conversation, and particularly at moments of conflict or tension.

The words that a character uses will tell the listener about the character's background. This sort of information might be shown by costume on stage. It is important to think about what we want the audience to know about a character, and the kind of language that the character would use that would give us this information, and how it might change in the play.

Action

As the audience cannot see what is happening on stage, you need to tell them. Characters need to describe what they are doing, or to describe what they can see others doing.

In some ways there are fewer boundaries for what can happen in a radio play than on stage. Characters can leap tall buildings, walk on the moon, and explore deep under the sea without needing stunt doubles or special effects.

Whether in a radio play or stage play, action is still about what happens. It is about what happens to characters, what they do in response, and how it all ends up.

Radio play scenes tend to be shorter than stage play scenes. This is because radio plays tend to be shorter than stage plays and because radio plays do not have as many pauses in the dialogue for action.

It is easy to vary the pace of the action in a radio play by developing short and long scenes. This helps to build up to a climax in the play and keep the audience interested. You might begin with longer scenes to introduce characters and what is happening, and scenes might become shorter as the action become more intense.

Gaps in the dialogue are sometimes filled with music or sound effects (SFX) to develop mood and help define the setting for the scene.

Time and place

As there is no set to show the audience where the action will take place, a radio scriptwriter must create a picture for the listener using a combination of music, sound effects, and dialogue. Characters may need to talk about where they are and what they can see more frequently than in a stage play. This is similar to some of the dialogue in a Shakespearean play, where originally, the use of set and scenery was minimal, and actors told the audience what time of day it was, and where they are.

The advantage of a radio play over a staged play is that you can set your play in any location and time that you choose and change location quickly and easily using words and sound. By using sound effects it is possible to evoke time of day, season, location, and era.

Tension

Tension can be developed by using silence, changing the length of scenes, locations, and the use of music as well as the events in the play. Dialogue can be faster or slower.

RADIO DRAMA AND ITS COMPONENTS

Drama is fictional form involving expressions and script written for actor to perform.

Radio drama is a form of drama which is intended to be broadcast on radio with no visual component.

Vital types of drama in terms of mood

1. Tragedy
2. Comedy
3. Satire

Types of drama in terms of making

1. Solo plays

These are individual plays produced for special occasions, days, etc, such as independence day, eid days, anniversaries of national heroes etc

2. Series

It contains different plays with different sub titles under the same main title portraying different shades of same theme

3. Serial

It contains one story that goes on to many episodes. Every episode has its own climax and the last episode carries the chief climax.

4. Soap

Soap drama actually presents family problems and conspiracies with no definite main character.

Rather every character by and large is equally important.

Components of Drama

1. **Plot / story board**

The story of the drama that contains turns & twists along with the central idea of the story is called the plot or story board.

2. **Script**

It consists of dialogues, monologues (character's verbal communication to himself), direction and suggested sound effects

3. **Expose/Entrance**

The introduction of characters is called the expose/entrance

4. **Climax**

It is the peak point of the conflicts

5. **Music**

- a) Situational (it depends upon the demand of situation and mood)
- b) Distinguishing (mark or identify the change in sequence)

6. **Sound effects**

Help the listeners imagine the story. There are 3 categories of sound effects

a) **Recorded**

Readymade Sound effects which are available on websites. Such as chirps of birds , rainfall, thunder storm, heart beat etc

b) **Manual**

These are not readymade sound effects rather recorded on account of requirement of the sequence manually. such as opening or closing of door, noise of heel, noise of cattle, washing utensils etc.

c) **Digital**

Nowadays digital devices are used for making required sound such as Multi effects mixer. Computer softwares have comprehensive menu of sound effects for studio mixing.

7. **Sequence**

In language of radio production scenes are called sequences