



Why write radio drama?



www.writersguild.org.uk

The Writers' Guild of Great Britain is a trade union
registered at 134 Tooley Street, London SE1 2TU

New writers welcome

Getting a break as a writer can be difficult but radio drama provides a daily platform for new writing which is unrivalled by TV or theatre. Podcasts are reinvigorating the medium and offer a growing range of opportunities for emerging voices to be heard. BBC Radio 4 is a flagship for dramatic writing in the UK, with the 45-minute Afternoon Drama slot attracting an audience of around a million for original plays.

Radio producer Sally Avens, speaking at the WGGB Meet the Radio Drama Producers event, highlighted the Afternoon Drama slot as a fertile target for new writers, adding “If you persevere, it *can* happen.” Other tips from the event included “Write what you’re passionate about” and “Don’t send an idea, send a script”. Find more advice at www.writersguild.org.uk/radiodramatips

“It’s a wonderful playground”

So said WGGB’s former radio chair Katharine Way, introducing a networking event on the subject and paying tribute to some recent highlights: two Somalian girls dealing with female genital mutilation; a 10-part drama on ancient Egypt; an *Archers* domestic abuse storyline that gripped the nation.

Doctor Foster writer and WGGB member Mike Bartlett struck the same chord while presenting the Tinniswood audio drama script award the same year:

“We should be especially proud of our audio drama culture... it is often described as a stepping stone for TV, but it should be the other way round.”

Intimacy with the audience

“Radio drama for writers is a beautiful thing,” said dramatist Nell Leyshon, presenting the Tinniswood Award to writer and actor Morwenna Banks in 2015. “It has exquisite intimacy. It goes straight into the listeners’ head”.

Tim Stimpson, former WGGB deputy chair and writer of *The Archers* Rob-Helen storyline, agrees. “Radio is homely – it’s what we put on as we’re cooking our tuna bake.” The success of that storyline, he believes, was the “drip-drip-drip of 12.5-minute episodes every night”, which meant that Rob’s abuse felt as though it was being visited upon us.

Risk-taking and creative control

Writers in other mediums might feel that they are having to create by committee, but not so audio drama. The relationship between writer and producer is crucial but also collaborative. Sally Avens has described it as being like a marriage: “As a producer, you love their voice. You love what they write... You will argue, you will fall out, but you will compromise and want to get back together.”

Radio drama is also less expensive to produce than other mediums and, as Tim Stimpson says, “It is precisely because it is cheap that writers are able to take risks, experiment and tell stories that wouldn’t have a chance elsewhere.”



A strong union to back you up

Radio writers may be freelance but that does not mean they face the lack of protection that other self-employed workers struggle with. This is due to WGGB – the writers’ union, our active radio committee and our trained officials who have negotiated an agreement with the BBC, the UK’s main broadcaster of audio drama. Writers have to be paid at least the minimum fee, and this fee increases every year. They enjoy other protections, too.

Join us

Even if you’re just starting out in your career, you can still join WGGB as a candidate member (£9 per month). You don’t have to have writing credits to join and you will be able to participate in an active, relevant union, as well as access a range of benefits.

Find out more and join: www.writersguild.org.uk



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