

THE POWER AND PLEASURE OF PODCASTING 2

The Return of
Radio Fiction

Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 5 p.m. PT

Friday, March 19, 2021, at 10 a.m. PT

Presented Online

University of Southern California

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCES AND PARTICIPANTS

- The podcast *Video Palace* is a scripted horror series about a couple's investigation into the origins of a mysterious VHS tape, created by Nick Braccia and *Blair Witch Project* producer Mike Monello. In this event, Monello will be joined by director and co-writer Ben Rock; sound designer Jeremy Lee; and actors Larry Cedar, Kelly Holden-Basha, Devin Sidell, and Graham Skipper.
- *The Bright Sessions* is a science fiction podcast created by Lauren Shippen about people with supernatural abilities and their mysterious therapist, Dr. Bright. This event will feature Shippen along with actors Charlie Ian, Anna Lore, Ian McQuown, Julia Morizawa, and Briggan Snow.

- *Radio Drama Revival* is an anthology show hosted by Elena Fernández Collins that showcases the diversity of contemporary audio fiction.
- Kathy Fuller-Seeley is the author of *Jack Benny and the Golden Age of American Radio Comedy*.
- Neil Verma is the author of *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama*.
- Heather Einhorn is the co-founder and executive producer of Einhorn's Epic Productions (EEP) an entertainment creative house that builds, owns, and manages platform-agnostic heroic franchise IP focusing on underserved (female/diverse) gen-z & millennial fandoms.
- Henry Jenkins is a USC professor of communication, journalism, cinematic arts, and education, and the author or editor of 20 books on media and popular culture.
- Colin Maclay is a USC research professor of communication and the executive director of the Annenberg Innovation Lab, which explores the interaction of society's wicked problems—and opportunities—with media, technology, and culture.

WHAT IS A PODCAST?

The first known use of the term “podcast” was by the futurist media maker Ben Hammersley, in a 2004 article in the *Guardian*. He was trying to find a word for the new medium of amateur radio that was being made for MP3 players like the iPod. “But what to call it? Audioblogging? Podcasting? GuerillaMedia?” he wrote. Well, we know which term stuck.

Although the term originally referred to Apple’s iPod, the medium has proved more enduring than the iPod itself, and today audio and video podcasts are available on many different platforms serving all kinds of devices and communities. Podcasting has exploded in recent years. Various sources estimate there are currently upwards of 800,000 active podcasts.

So what exactly is a podcast? It’s digital audio (or video) on demand. Unlike traditional, or “terrestrial” radio, a podcast can be produced (and enjoyed) by anyone with a computer, smart phone, or tablet and an Internet connection. Podcasters can make their productions as short or long as they want, since they don’t need to fit into a broadcast time slot, and they can serve audiences of any size or type. It’s a form well suited to niche interests and the spirit of independent media. But it’s also becoming increasingly commercial. *Business Insider* says 2021 is the year podcasting will become a \$1B business. In addition to advertising and subscriptions, it has become a venue for development of new scripted ideas and audiences, in which stories and characters may even find their way into books, television, and movies.

Podcasting represents a site of rapid experimentation and innovation, which is reimagining the nature of radio as a medium. At the most basic level, podcasting changes the way radio operates, as it is no longer grounded in the geographically local or restricted to national borders, allowing new constructions of the radio audience (regional, global, subcultural) and its relationship to content producers. Likewise fundamental is that podcasts are asynchronous and on-demand, allowing users to enjoy them at their preferred time, pace, and sequence. The rise of podcasts has put new emphasis onto the spoken voice, providing a platform for interviews and conversations, for short-form and long-form journalism and documentary, and for the return of radio drama and comedy as vibrant genre traditions.

RADIO DRAMA AND COMEDY

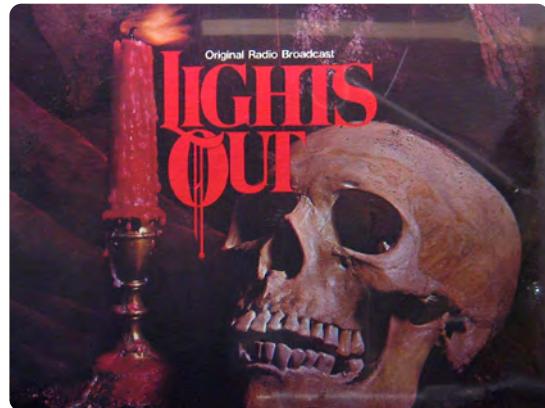
Both comedy and drama thrived during the classic age of American radio, basically from the 1930s through the late 1950s. More recently, there have been pockets of experimentation, particularly in the United Kingdom, with innovative use of sound-based fictions. But it has taken podcasting to revitalize this art form. Now, there are a wide array of experiments in podcasting for drama and comedy, which are being celebrated through this event.

SOME CLASSIC RADIO DRAMAS:

- ◉ Suspense – “Leinegen and the Ants”
oldtimeradiodownloads.com/thriller/suspense/leinengen-vs-the-ants-1957-08-25
- ◉ Suspense – “Sorry, Wrong Number”
oldtimeradiodownloads.com/thriller/suspense/sorry-wrong-number-1944-02-24
- ◉ Lights Out – Arch Obler’s “The Dark”
wgnradio.com/john-williams/arch-oblers-the-dark-a-classic-radio-horror

VOCABULARY CORNER: GENRE FICTION

“Genre fiction” is a term used to describe popular, mass-market, or entertaining fiction, as opposed to artistic “literary fiction.” It often refers to specific genres that are plot-driven and have well-established templates and tropes, such as horror, science fiction, mystery, romance, thriller, and fantasy. “Literary fiction,” in this framing, describes more character-based works that may not follow a familiar structure, and may be ambiguous and/or difficult to read. However, for at least the past decade, writers and critics have increasingly questioned the binary between “genre” and “literary” fiction, with plenty of literary works being created within the genres of horror, sci-fi, and so forth. So while the distinction between “literary fiction” and “genre fiction” may be of waning relevance, “genre fiction” can still be understood as plot-driven fiction that works with familiar aesthetics and tropes.



Orson Welles rehearsing his radio depiction of H.G. Wells’ classic, *The War of the Worlds*.



- Mercury Theater – Orson Welles’s “War of the Worlds”
sounds.mercurytheatre.info/mercury/381030.mp3
- Norman Corwin’s “The Undecided Molecule”
radiodramarevival.com/episode-173-norman-corwins-undecided-molecule

SOME RECENT DRAMA AND COMEDY PODCASTS:

- *Homecoming*
gimletmedia.com/shows/homecoming
- *Welcome to Night Vale*
welcometonightvale.com
- *Bronzeville*
podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bronzeville/id1199964972
- *Limetown*
twoupproductions.com/limetown/podcast
- *Blackout*
podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/blackout/id1447513097
- *Passenger List*
passengerlist.org
- *The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel*
pinna.fm/library/kids-shows/pinna-podcasts/the-unexplainable-disappearance-of-mars-patel?gclid=CjwKCAiAp4KCBhB6EiwAxRxbpMglZgyXRwFCKWzJ5sQSs4H5NkjjIX3ZghSxQxF2zBQjMF-PmSGy7RoC338QAvD_BwE

MAKE YOUR OWN PODCAST: TOOLS AND TIPS FROM USC ANNENBERG

There are lots of great resources online about podcasting, including the "[How To Make a Podcast](#)" toolkit (email registration required) from Misca Euseph and Charlotte Harrison, which begins with whether to make one and then moves into how and even how to earn revenue. howtomakeapodcast.org

There are endless audio resources, guides, and learning opportunities at Transom.org.

RECORDING

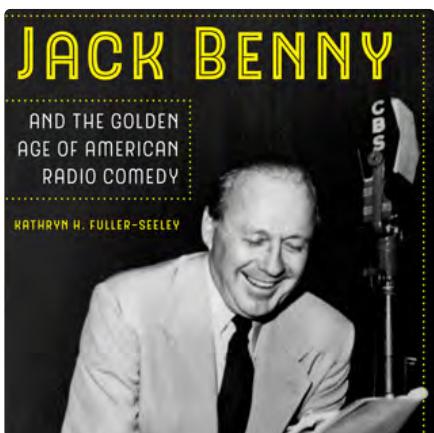
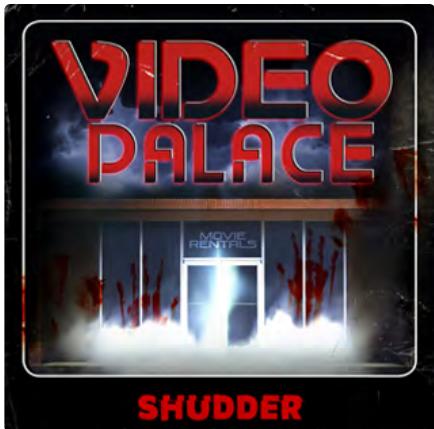
Tascam DR-100MKII (about \$130 used/\$300 new) for field recording with RE-50 omni and Rode NTG-2 shotgun mics.

Tips:

- If you want an audio recorder for field work, buy one that has XLR inputs for external microphones.
- Cell phones are not good-quality audio lines, but can work in some cases. Try the app Tape A Call. And remember that California is a two-party consent state so you must have the person's permission to record a call.

EDITING

- Audacity (Mac and PC) – open source
- GarageBand – comes included with all Macs
- Reaper (Mac and PC) – low-cost editing software (\$60)
- Adobe Audition (Mac and PC) – for more sophisticated production; you can buy a monthly license or subscribe with Adobe Creative Cloud



TRANSCRIPTION

- Transcribe - \$20/year
- Trint - plans starting at \$48/month
- Temi - \$.25/minute; free trial available
- Descript - 3 hrs. free, then plans start at \$12/mo.
- oTranscribe - free

HOME STUDIO

To set up a simple home studio, you'll need

- An acoustical foam cube to isolate mics and keep out background sound; Pyle makes one called the Sound Recording Booth Box Studio Soundproofing Foam Shield Isolation Filter Cube
- A USB audio interface for two mics, such as the Scarlett 2i2
- Over-the-ear headphones such as the Sony MDRZX110/BLK ZK (\$15)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How are podcasts changing the overall media landscape?
- How does world-building work in podcasts versus in cinema, games, or other mediums?
- What's a podcast you wish existed? Have you thought about making it?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

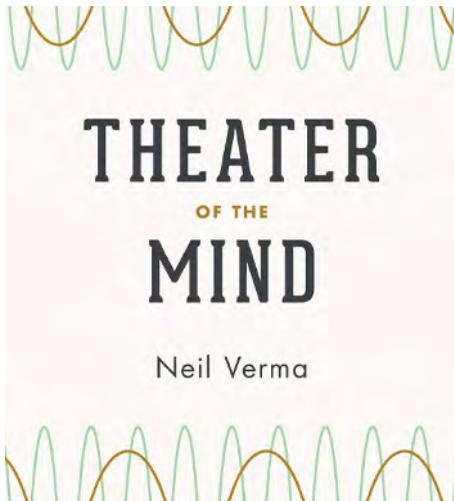
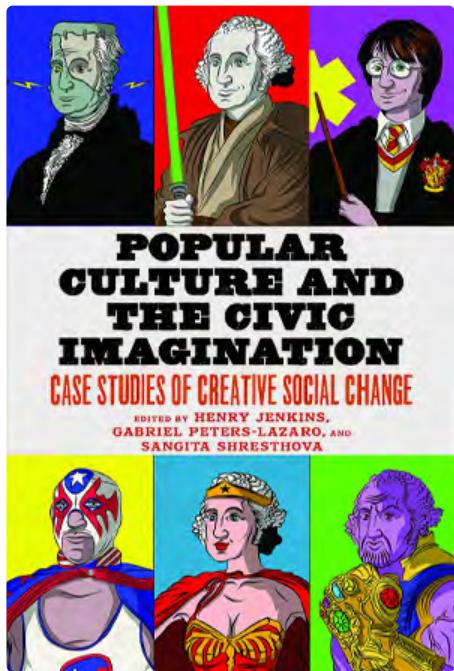
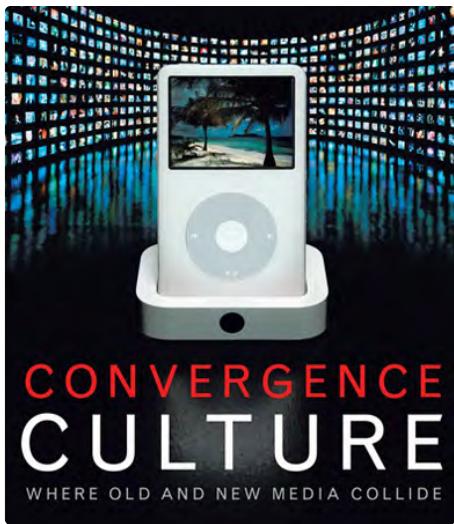
- *Video Palace*
videopalace.shudder.com
- *The Bright Sessions*
thebrightsessions.com
- *Radio Drama Revival*
radiodramarevival.com
- *Einhorn's Epic Productions (EEP)*
eepuniverse.com
- *Transom*
transom.org
- *How to Make a Podcast*
howtomakeapodcast.org
- *Escuela Radio Ambulante*
escuelaradioambulante.org
- *USC Annenberg Media Resource Website*
resources.uscannenbergmedia.com

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

MELISSA MILLER of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- Alexa Dilworth and John Biewen, [Reality Radio: Telling True Stories in Sound](#) (Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2017).
- Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, [Jack Benny and the Golden Age of American Radio Comedy](#) (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2017).



- Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2006).
- Henry Jenkins, Gabriel Peters-Lazaro, and Sangita Shresthova, *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination: Case Studies of Creative Social Change* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2020).
- Ellen McCracken, *The Serial Podcast and Storytelling in the Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012).

ARTICLES

- Brent Lang and Todd Spangler, “[How Conan O'Brien and Other Top Hosts Are Tapping Into the Podcast Revolution](#),” *Variety* (August 20, 2019).
- D. Robert Casares and Erin E Binkley, “[Podcasts as an Evolution of Bibliotherapy](#),” *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 43, no. 1 (2021): 19.
- Christopher Cwynar, “[Self-Service Media: Public Radio Personalities, Reality Podcasting, and Entrepreneurial Culture](#),” *Popular Communication* 17, no. 4 (2019): 317–32.
- Elena Fernández Collins, “[5 Strategies for Enticing Audiences to Try Fiction Podcasts](#)” (March 4, 2020).
- Dallas Rogers, et al., “[The City Under COVID-19: Podcasting As Digital Methodology](#).” *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 111, no. 3 (2020): 434–50.

JOURNALS

- [Critical Studies in Media Communication](#)
- [Television & New Media](#)

STREAMING VIDEO

- [Ear Buds: The Podcasting Documentary](#) (Comedy Dynamics, 2016).
- [Kanopy Streaming Services: Media & Popular Culture](#)
- [USC Libraries Research Guide on Streaming Media](#)