

# AudioFile™

The Monthly Newsletter of Audio Reviews

JUNE 1992  
Volume 1, Number 1



## PUSH THE PLAY BUTTON

### *How We Evaluate the Audio Performance*

*AudioFile* breaks new ground with its first issue as a reviewing agency for audiobooks and other forms of spoken-word audio. Traditional library sources provide reviews, but librarians and publishers agree there is more to be done. *AudioFile* will focus on audio presentation. We assume the literature itself has been reviewed for content and merit in other publications. *AudioFile* reviewers will present the briefest of plot synopses and move directly to the elements that are distinctive to the audio format.

*AudioFile* intends to make the reviews useful for the selection process: articulate, descriptive and insightful. Don't think we won't be critical. Our reviewers will make their picks and pans, but always in appreciation of the product and the format. Our reviewers are all audiophiles. We believe in audio and strive to encourage the best from audio producers, realizing that the ultimate audience represents a broad spectrum of patrons from long distance truck drivers to commuting executives, from house painters to high school students.

*AudioFile* sets some standards: *the choice of narrator* is key to the success of the presentation. The interpretation of the written material needs to match the author's narrative voice. The success of this union of text and voice will receive attention from our reviewers. *The style of narration* should be identified. Is it the level, even voice of a single narrator who relies on pace and inflection rather than vocal changes to distinguish among characters? Or does the reader use multiple vocal

PLAY BUTTON *Continued on Back Cover*

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUDIOBOOK RECORDINGS

### *A Publisher's Overview*

The American spoken-word audio publishing industry began in the 1950's when two artistic recording companies, Spoken Arts and Caedmon, began to issue readings of poetry and stories. The high cost of producing studio masters and pressing LP discs in those days severely limited the growth of spoken-word. This situation changed in the 1970's with the introduction of the audio cassette and the creation of high-quality inexpensive cassette players. By 1988 more than 300 million cassette players had been sold in the U.S. and had become a near standard feature in automobiles.

HISTORY *Continued on Page 11*

## THE AFRICAN QUEEN

*C. S. Forester*

*Read by Michael Kitchen*

Sterling Audio, 1992

Six cassettes / 6 hrs. 15 min.

Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak

\$49.95 ISBN 1-56054-966-1

Images of Bogart and Hepburn only enhance the tale of this unlikely pair during their determined assault against the Germans. Michael Kitchen presents a vivid narrative of overwhelming African heat, discomfort and maddening insects. His easy tone switches deftly from Charlie's patient excuses to Rose's impassioned schemes. The pace of the reading flows resignedly like the Lumbasi River and then boils with the fervor of their plan. The text is enhanced by phrasing and pace; Kitchen provides fitting voices for each character with subtle inflections. A selector who is prompted by familiarity with the movie will not be disappointed by this version, which is enlivened in audio interpretation. *R.F.W.*

## MONK'S HOOD

*Ellis Peters*

*Read by Patrick Tull*

Recorded Books, 1991

Seven cassettes / 9 hrs. 30 min.

Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak

\$49.95 Rental \$16.50 #91409

Brother Cadfael, the medieval monk and herbalist, seeks out the culprit when one of his medicinal concoctions is used to kill. The most likely suspect is the victim's young stepson. Patrick Tull's rough, slightly gravelly voice is well suited to portraying the elderly monks, from Cadfael's deep growl, tinged with

MONK'S HOOD *Continued Next Page*





## Letter from the Publisher

Dear Reader,

Where did *AudioFile* come from? From an audiophile, of course. My passion for being read to has kept me sitting in the car to hear the end of a tape half an hour after arriving at my destination. As a library trustee and avid consumer of audiobooks, I recognize their tremendous growth and the nationwide demand for them. I feel that audio reviews should tell about the audio performance in a direct, accessible format.

What can you expect in the months ahead? Each issue will contain at least twenty-five reviews. The *Double Takes* column will be a comparative analysis; *The Listening Ear*, a soapbox. Practical articles will add perspective to your professional concerns and personal audio interests. We reflect the excitement of the growing audiobook field and aim to bring that to you.

Your comments will help us do a better job. I want to open and continue a productive dialogue and welcome input by letter or phone. With your guidance we expect to fulfill the promise of this new venture.

*Robin F. Whitten*

Robin F. Whitten

**AudioFile**  
The Monthly Newsletter of Audio Reviews



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Editorial Board and Contributors Vol. 1/No. 1  
Lee W. Baer, Thomas T. Beeler, Deborah Crimmins, Elizabeth Dodge, Nann Blaine Hilyard, Brita Holmquist, Sheldon Kaye, Shirley Jacks, Christine Richards, G. Robinson Whitten, Preston Wilson

**MONK'S HOOD** *Continued from cover*  
a hint of a Welsh accent, to Prior Robert's aristocratic tones, to Abbot Heribet's ancient whisper. So convincing is his evocation of age that the voices of the impetuous, teenaged Edwin or that of Brother Mark are a surprise. Characterization is subtle, based as much upon speed and intonation as upon vocal pitch or timbre. *S.H.*

### PUDD'N HEAD WILSON

*Mark Twain*

*Read by Ray Verna*

The Literate Ear, 1990

Four cassettes / 4 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$21.10 ISBN 1-56544-015-3

Twain's basic point that upbringing is everything is portrayed in this dark and complex satire on people's inability to see beyond racial stereotypes. Ray Verna's fully voiced recording is of consistently good quality in audio production and reader performance. While Twain's work is often performed in an older, crotchety voice, Verna interprets with a smoother, more standard voice, more appropriate for the character of twenty-five-year-old David Wilson. Verna is also effective characterizing the desperate and shrewd Roxy, no doubt helped by Twain's phonetically written black dialect. Verna understands the story well and is sincere in his delivery. This is the audio equivalent of attending good amateur theater where earnestness counts, and small deficiencies are overlooked. *P.W.*

### RUINED CITY

*Nevil Shute*

*Read by Robin Bailey*

Chivers Audio Books/G.K. Hall, 1992

Six cassettes/ 7 hrs. 13 min.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$53.95 ISBN 0-8161-9278-2

Wealthy London banker Henry Warren's life has become a shambles until he stumbles into the severely depressed town of Sharples. The spirit of the unemployed townspeople gives Warren's life new direction and some surprises—which make for lively listening. Robin Bailey's reading is

impeccably clear, and the pace is perfect. He depicts each character with a different voice. From the butler's imperious attitude to the bluster of the tram driver, the narrator captures our attention. Women's voices are done with equal professionalism. The packaging accurately depicts the spirit of the novel and includes story and narrator information. Highly recommended for any popular fiction collection. *J.M.*

### THE ASPERN PAPERS

*Henry James*

*Read by Grover Gardner*

Audio Book Contractors, 1992

Three cassettes / 4 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$23.50 Rental \$7.85 ISBN 1-55685-240-1

Henry James sets his novella of irony and suspense in the decaying splendor of a Venetian palazzo. Grover Gardner's diction is immaculate. His voice is elegant. He controls his energy so that one never tires of hearing him. As the story builds, he does not dramatize the plot; he simply reads what is on the page and the listener colors in the scene. The narrative is a well done exercise for imagination. Appreciation for the full text of this work makes a powerful case for dedication to unabridged recordings. *J.P.*

### THE OLD SILENT

*Martha Grimes*

*Read by Tim Curry*

Simon & Schuster, 1992

Two cassettes/ 3 hrs.

Abridged Fiction/Mystery Airbox pak

\$16.00 ISBN 0-671-73617-5

Set in West Yorkshire and Cornwall, this story challenges Martha Grimes' major character, Superintendent Richard Jury, to find out the real reason that a perfectly sane and patient wife should murder her husband ten years after their only child has been kidnapped and presumably killed. The abridgment, written by Jill Ellyn Riley, provides a smooth narrative flow without any obvious gaps or lapses and with more than a few touches of characterization and byplay not always



found in abridgments. Tim Curry's narration is consistent and expressive: he handles character voicing well but has some trouble with Yorkshire and Baltimore accents. *T.T.B.*

### HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

*Douglas Adams*  
Read by Douglas Adams  
Dove Audio, 1991  
Four cassettes / 6 hrs.  
Unabridged Fiction Airbox pak  
\$24.95 ISBN 1-55800-273-1

### OLE DOC METHUSELAH

*L. Ron Hubbard*  
Read by Roddy McDowell  
Bridge Audio, 1992  
Four cassettes / 6 hrs.  
Abridged Fiction/SciFi Airbox pak  
\$24.95 ISBN 0-88404-654-0

Before Dr. Who, Jedi knight Luke Skywalker or the Starship Enterprise, there was *Ole Doc Methuselah*. Veteran character actor Roddy McDowell narrates Hubbard's pulp creation in an almost full-text adaptation. McDowell delights the audio listener with his collection of character voices. In the unabridged reading of his science fiction satire, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams catches the reader's interest with a vocal style that is a cross between Jack Benny's and W.C. Fields'. The performance is very fast-paced and full of pleasure. *B.P.*

### FLESH AND BLOOD

*Thomas H. Cook*  
Read by Peter Whitman  
Sterling Audio, 1992  
Eight cassettes / 10 hrs. 15 min.  
Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak  
\$64.95 ISBN 1-50654-964-5

Private investigator Frank Clemons finds more than he expects when hired to find the nearest relative of murdered couturier Hannah Karlsberg. He gets caught up in Hannah's life story, which starts in the garment district's sweatshops and ends on the Upper West Side, with a mysterious interlude in Colombia. British narrator Peter Whitman handles Jewish and Eastern European accents well but makes the

Alabama-born Frank sound slow-witted and grudging. Annoyingly, the narrator retains Frank's implausible southern accent beyond his actual dialogue, but the story itself is very suspenseful. *N.B.H.*

### BATTLEFIELD EARTH

*L. Ron Hubbard*  
Read by Roddy McDowell  
Bridge Audio, 1991  
Six cassettes / 8 hrs.  
Abridged Fiction/SciFi Airbox pak  
\$29.95 ISBN 0-88404-682-6

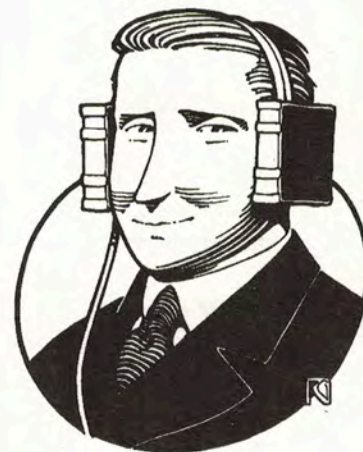
This first-class adventure novel is imbedded in mediocre science fiction, which contains no trace of Hubbard's Scientology. One thousand years after his sadistic race nearly destroyed humanity, an alien teaches a human too much, and we prevail. McDowell's voice is perfect with accented voices and passionate narration. The text is not burdened by music or sound effects though tape turning instructions would have been appreciated. Recommended for all popular collections. *D.W.*

### A PALM FOR MRS. POLLIFAX

*Dorothy Gilman*  
Read by Barbara Rosenblat  
Recorded Books, 1991  
Five cassettes / 7 hrs. 15 min.  
Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak  
\$36.95 Rental \$13.50 #91403

Dorothy Gilman's elderly spy from New Jersey has a new mission—to infiltrate a spa in Switzerland in connection with a stolen shipment of radioactive materials. All the turns of the plot unfold with just enough suspense to keep the listener interested. This is a good selection for the audio format, but Rosenblat's narration done in a slightly British accent, distances the text from the reader. She successfully differentiates each character and approximates foreign accents nicely; however, there is no excitement in the presentation. One never gets the feeling that Mrs. Pollifax comes from New Jersey. A more earthy, humorous narration might have given the story the vitality to rise above the ordinary. *C.R.W.*

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### THE APPLES OF THE HESPERIDES

*Agatha Christie*

*Read by Daniel Massey*

Durkin Hayes Audio, 1992

Two cassettes / 3 hrs.

Abridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak

\$15.95 ISBN 0-88646-281-9

Nobody wants us to understand these stories. They are told as anecdotes. They are rushed. They are cut down to miniature mysteries. They are frenzied and unsettling. They did want us to hear Daniel Massey and his many voices and dialects. He is good. He is a perfect Hercule Poirot, a prissy schoolmarm, an effusive Russian. There is too much dialogue, too much speed and too much emphasis on Daniel Massey. *J.P.*

### BUCKSKIN BRIGADE

*L. Ron Hubbard*

*Read by Bruce Boxleitner*

Bridge Audio, 1992

Two cassettes / 3 hrs.

Abridged Fiction/Western Airbox pak

\$15.95 ISBN 0-88404-709-1

### WALK TALL, RIDE TALL

*Burt & Budd Arthur*

*Read by Forest Bradley*

Sunset Productions, 1991

One cassette / 1 hr. 30 min.

Abridged Fiction/Western Airbox pak

\$10.95 ISBN 1-56431-004-3

Bruce Boxleitner sounds as comfortable in his reading as he looks in the saddle of any of his TV westerns. His breezy, almost effortless narration combines with a very visual text. The story of a white Native American is reminiscent of *Dances with Wolves*, but this audio has a wider spectrum of characters in a short format. The best part is that few audio effects are used and the listener is allowed to enjoy Boxleitner's storytelling abilities. Forest Bradley's verbal pictures are sometimes overtaken by sound effects and music, but Bradley breathes new life into this old formula, reminiscent of a John Wayne western. *B.P.*



### STARTREK: PROBE

*Margaret Wander Bonanno*

*Read by James Doohan*

Simon & Schuster Audio, 1992

Two cassettes / 3 hrs.

Abridged Fiction/SciFi Repak

\$17.00 ISBN 0-671-73727-9

This adventure relates a saga of whales and the Starship Enterprise's attempts to save the earth. It is a well presented and performed adaptation. James Doohan, Starship Enterprise's own Scotty, uses a full repertoire of mellow voices to represent the different characters, male and female. The music is appropriate. The spots in which Doohan reads over a musical passage enhance the story by turning spoken word into imagery. Several types of cassette players were used in reviewing this material, and several settings of graphic equalizer were tried. The performance stood up well on everything from battery to plug-in machine. The tapes withstood the repeated stop-start they took during the process and produced no woof or wobble. *J.Z.D.*  
*Ed. Note: This reviewer is blind and gives special attention to sound quality.*

### BOWDRIE FOLLOWS A COLD TRAIL

*Louis L'Amour*

*Read by a cast of readers*

Bantam Audio, 1992

One cassette / 1 hr.

Dramatization Fiction/Western Repak

\$9.99 ISBN 0-553-47053-1

Chick Bowdrie, Texas Ranger, discovers the skeleton of a man murdered sixteen years earlier; he vows to find the man's kidnapped wife and child and to hunt down the murderer. This dramatization of

a specially adapted short story is one of seventeen L'Amour stories produced to date by Bantam Audio and one of seven featuring Bowdrie. It features a narrator, eight character actors, background music and sound effects; as such, this radio drama is well-

done. The story is well paced, and the acting is at least as good as you will find on TV. *T.T.B.*



## MYSTERY MILE

Margery Allingham

Read by Francis Matthews

Chivers Audio Books/G.K. Hall, 1992

Eight cassettes / 8 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak  
\$69.95 ISBN 0-8161-9288-X

Albert Campion takes on the usual collection of unbelievable, yet charming, characters. The eccentric cast, focusing on an American judge pursued by the ominous Simister gang, is given a range of voices by narrator Francis Matthews. Though Matthews has recorded numerous Allingham titles, the husky American accents and servants' dialects are somewhat distracting. The secondary characters are slightly exaggerated while the central characters' accents are restrained. The narrator does lead the reader adeptly through the twists of the tale and presents an accomplished interpretation. Another of Campion's "adventures undertaken for a small fee," this will undoubtedly give satisfaction to the enthusiast. *R.F.W.*

## ANNA, WHERE ARE YOU?

Patricia Wentworth

Read by Nadia May

Blackstone Audio, 1992

Six cassettes / 9 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak  
\$34.95 Rental \$12.95 #1278

Hired to trace Anna Ball, who has vanished, Miss Maud Silver encounters an eccentric art colony, bank robberies and counterfeiting. As with other Miss Silver mysteries, the story relies on character development. Nadia May reads clearly and distinguishes individuals well; her British voice is ideal for this genteel period thriller (1951). Agatha Christie fans will enjoy this one. The narration is speeded up to fit six cassettes, but it is not hard to follow. *N.B.H.*

## THE TREE OF HANDS

Ruth Rendell

Read by Imelda Staunton

Chivers Audio Books/G.K. Hall, 1991

Eight cassettes / 9 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction/Mystery Book pak  
\$69.95 ISBN 0-8161-92650

Novelist Benet Archdale and housemaid Carol Stratford are two young, single parents who have no reason to know each other. They become tangled in a nightmarish spiral of kidnap, fraud, family violence and death. Ruth Rendell creates psychological suspense in thrillers that are compulsively readable or, in this case, listenable. British actress Imelda Staunton's reading is perfectly paced, and the characters are well defined. You'll have a hard time turning it off. *N.B.H.*



## THE FIFTH HORSEMAN

Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre

Read by Christopher Hurt

Blackstone Audio, 1991

Twelve cassettes / 18 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak  
\$59.95 Rental \$16.95 #1177

A thermonuclear bomb planted in New York City provides powerful leverage against the President of the United States. Muammar al-Qaddafi, Israeli government leaders, U.S. officials and the terrorists make up the cast of characters. Christopher Hurt does a masterful job of narration. His pacing and voice identify each individual and draw the reader into the action. At the same time, Hurt's sensitive interpretation allows the reader to sympathize with the different dilemmas involved. The scenario seems plausible; Hurt's powerful reading moves it into the realm of possibility. *L.S.*



## Publishers List: Vol. 1/ No. 1

Artana Productions  
POB 1054, Marshfield, MA 02050  
800-626-5356  
Dist: Yellow Moon Press;  
Peachtree Press

Audio Book Contractors  
POB 40115, Washington, DC 20016  
202-363-3429  
Direct distribution

August House  
POB 3223, Little Rock, AK 72203  
800-284-8784  
Direct distribution

Bantam Audio  
666 Fifth Ave. New York, NY 10103  
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PUBLISHERS Continued on Page 7





## The Listening Ear

As patrons are increasingly drawn to audiobooks, our problem in libraries has not been lack of supply. The proliferation of audiobook productions now brings up the issue of quality. We need a literature of audio criticism that would help librarians make selections.

The Durkin Hayes rendition of *The Call of the Wild*, one of no fewer than 18 audio versions of this work listed in *Words on Cassette*, illustrates several of the considerations that must be addressed. The producers wisely chose an accomplished actor, Theodore Bikel, to narrate, and the production clearly benefits from his craftsmanship. But Bikel's speech has an overriding Eastern European accent which, while very appealing, is unsuited to the author's narrative voice. Furthermore, Durkin Hayes has abridged London's tightly constructed novella, to fit its two-cassette program. Cutting such a short piece raises the whole question of abridgments. Are they ever appropriate? Other concerns include pacing, differentiating characters' voices, use of one or multiple readers, the narrator's emotional tone and vocal pitch. As the critical vocabulary develops, prospects are excellent for this popular medium to mature in quality. — *Sheldon Kaye*  
*Sheldon Kaye is director of the Portland Public Library*

**THE CALL OF THE WILD**, Jack London  
Read by Theodore Bikel  
Durkin Hayes, 1992  
Two cassettes / 3 hrs., Abridged  
ISBN 0-88646-308-4



## Packaging Key

Packaging designations: *AudioFile* uses three descriptions of audiobook packaging:

**Book pak:** Heat sealed, molded vinyl package for single or multiple cassettes - the most durable packaging for library circulation currently available.

**Airbox pak:** Molded plastic tray holder with paperboard or plastic covers - packaging favored by retailers, but of limited value for circulation.

**Repak:** All other plastic or paper cases which are not suitable for library use.

### SEVENTH SON

Orson Scott Card  
Read by Orson Scott Card  
The Literate Ear, 1991  
Five cassettes / 7 hrs. 30 min.  
Unabridged Fiction Book pak  
\$23.50 ISBN 1-56544-018-8

Multiple-award-winner Card is one of the greatest practitioners of science fiction; here he delivers a history fantasy of the Wabash Valley circa 1800, a world of hexes and folk magic. This is the first book about Alvin Maker, the seventh son of a seventh son, who has remarkable psychic powers. Card is a very good narrator, expressive and well-paced. One can hear the excitement of an author as he brings his own well-described characters to life. There is one momentary technical glitch, the only slip-up in an exemplary presentation. Highly recommended for fiction collections everywhere. *D.W.*



### AGAINST THE WIND

J.F. Freedman  
Read by David Colacci  
Brilliance, 1992  
Ten cassettes / 15 hrs.  
Unabridged Fiction Book pak  
\$89.25 ISBN 1-56100-090-6

Hotshot trial attorney Will Alexander has few clients left when four motorcycle gang members accused of a grisly crime request him for their defense. If the reader does not object to the graphic crime descriptions and steamy sexual encounters, David Colacci presents a masterful interpretation of this compelling story. The vocal characterization of Alexander brilliantly portrays the duality of the hard-living antihero and an unusually caring father. Cadence and tone are used with great success to depict Alexander's inner voice, a particularly hard "character" to represent and to differentiate from the rest of the dialogue. A fine selection for audio, the listener is drawn in as judge and jury and led on by Alexander's own compulsion to succeed. *R.F.W.*

### TREASURE ISLAND

Robert Louis Stevenson  
Read by Keir Dullea  
Durkin Hayes, 1992  
Two cassettes / 3 hrs.  
Abridged Fiction Book pak  
\$15.95 ISBN 0-88646-312-2

This favorite tale is adapted to a three-hour format with reasonable success. Stevenson's vivid characterizations are missed, but the story flows well. Keir

Dullea has a clear, resonant voice which projects well but fails to convey enough of the sinister guile of Long John Silver. The gruffness of the pirates' voices and their gallantry will be popular with a young audience but seem somewhat one-dimensional. The voice

of Jim Hawkins, recounting the legend, varies in energy and at times loses its youthfulness. After this introduction, a listener can seek the full text to fill out the images. *R.F.W.*

### TEXANS ON THE POWDER

M. & M. Lehman  
Read by Gene Engene  
Books in Motion, 1989  
Six cassettes / 6 hrs. 30 min.  
Unabridged Fiction/Western Book pak  
\$33.95 ISBN 1-55686-327-6

The familiar story of a cattle drive from Texas to Montana during the glory days of the American West is presented in a crisp and professional recording though not wholly successfully. As a narrator, Engene's dry, clipped style is appropriate for the Western genre, and he moves along at a good pace. However, he compensates for somewhat thin writing with thick dialects. The results often get in the way of the story. Despite Engene's attempt to use every possible note of his vocal range, one cowboy twang blends into another. Because characters are externally drawn rather than internally felt, he is unable to maintain dialect consistency in the heat of conversation. For die-hard Western fans only. *C.T.*



## DOWNTOWN

Ed McBain

Read by Michael Pritchard

Books on Tape, 1992

Eight cassettes / 8 hrs.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$64.00 Rental \$19.50 #2940

McBain's recounting of one man's travails in the *Big Apple on Christmas Eve* is a not-so-funny comedy of errors. It is complete with slick scam artists, phony detectives, a luscious Asian woman and enough dangling plot threads for a dozen books. The delight here is McBain's dialogue—part Beckett, part Vonnegut meets Sam Spade. Michael Pritchard's restrained reading works well with the material. He uses dialect and different voices when necessary, but his reserved tone lets the fast-paced action and dialogue speak for themselves. The package is plain, but sparks fly when the tapes begin to play. *M.J.C.*

## CHINA LAKE

Anthony Hyde

Read by David McCallum

Simon & Schuster, 1992

Two cassettes / 3 hrs.

Abridged Fiction Repak

\$17.00 ISBN 0-671-75982-5

A complex plot of revenge and twenty-year-old missile secrets entangles a former security officer and a discredited scientist. David McCallum's voice perfectly reflects the tension and pace of the story. Accomplished accents, a soft Scot's burr, clipped British speech, an American twang, are sparsely and subtly applied to differentiate characters. Both protagonists, Tannis and Harper, speak in the first person which confuses the listener, but the fragmented story line is linked by a deliberateness in McCallum's narration. This book is a challenging candidate for abridgment; the listener is caught up by the allure of the reader, then left confused by gaps and dangling subplots. *R.F.W.*



## GREEN SMOKE

Rosemary Manning

Read by Sian Phillips

Chivers Audio Books/ G.K. Hall, 1992

Three cassettes / 3 hrs. 40 min.

Unabridged Children's Fiction Book pak

\$26.95 ISBN 0-8161-9242-1

A family vacation in Cornwall becomes a magical journey into the past when Sue meets R. Dragon, master storyteller and lover of sugar buns. In return for sharing her "elevenes," Sue hears tales of King Arthur, Childe Roland and Mollie Whuppie. Sian Phillips reads with as much magic as R. Dragon tells stories. Her interpretation of the characters leaves the reader with a clear impression of each. This charming story whets the appetite for more tales springing from the mists of the past. The book is a wonderful choice for 8 to 11-year-olds as well as anyone who loves Arthurian lore. *L.S.*

## LONDON TO LADYSMITH

Winston S. Churchill

Read by David Case

Books on Tape, 1992

Seven cassettes / 10 hrs. 30 min.

Unabridged Nonfiction Book pak

\$56.00 Rental \$18.50 #2948

As a young and eager Boer War correspondent, Churchill mailed these dispatches to the *London Daily Telegraph*. Case's reading moves at a vigorous pace that is consistent with the excitement of the dispatches.

However, his British accent lends both a nasal quality and faint ennui. While this characterizes the British government's complacent prosecution of the war, it does injustice to the energy and immediacy of the young correspondent's work. The reading and packaging don't entirely enhance the text.

An introduction, background or maps would make imaginative use of the plain vinyl cases. *P.E.F.*



## Publishers List

Continued from Page 5

G.K. Hall Audio Publishers  
70 Lincoln St. Boston, MA 02111  
800-343-2806  
Dist: G.K. Hall; Baker & Taylor

High Windy Audio  
POB 553, Fairview, NC 28730  
800-637-8679  
Dist: Baker & Taylor; Ingram

The Literate Ear  
POB 29762  
Elkins Park, PA 19117-0962  
800-777-8327  
Direct distribution

Recorded Books™  
POB 79, Charlotte Hall, MD 20622  
800-638-1304  
Direct distribution

Simon & Schuster Audio  
1230 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10020  
212-698-7000

Stemmer House Publishers  
2627 Caves Road  
Owings Mills, MD 21117  
301-363-3690  
Dist: Baker & Taylor; Ingram

Sterling Audio  
POB 159, Thorndike, ME 04986  
207-948-2962  
Dist: Thorndike Press

Sunset Productions  
369 Montezuma #172  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
800-829-5723  
Dist: Baker & Taylor; Ingram

Watershed Tapes  
6925 Willow St. NW, #201  
Washington, DC 20012  
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## Double Takes

### THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain

Read by Tim Behrens

Books in Motion, 1991

Eight cassettes / 11 hrs. 15 min.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$41.95 ISBN 1-55686-348-9

### THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain

Read by Michael Pritchard

Books on Tape, 1977

Eight cassettes / 10 hrs. 30 min.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$56.00 Rental \$17.50 #1062

### THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Mark Twain

Read by Norman Dietz

Recorded Books, 1991

Eight cassettes / 11 hrs. 45 min.

Unabridged Fiction Book pak

\$56.95 Rental \$16.50 #91327

Presented with choosing from three unabridged audiobook versions, which one should a librarian buy? Patrons are becoming more and more discriminating about the fidelity of the audio production as well as the artistry of the reading performance. Michael Pritchard's 1977 reading for Books on Tape reflects a quality typical for that time; the fidelity is only fair. Pritchard's reading is too rushed and gives the listener little chance to form images and absorb the material. His vocal characterizations are only moderately effective in helping the listener enter Huck's world of diverse personalities. If Pritchard's heart really is into telling the story, his voice betrays him.

Norman Dietz's 1991 interpretation is at a more listenable speed and Recorded Books' acclaimed level of audio fidelity is definitely present. The immediacy of the voice produces an intimacy with the story. Dietz does not merely read; he interprets and gives life to the story. He portrays a very sympathetic and believable Huckleberry. His other vocal

characterizations, however, particularly the real Phelps brother and the slave Jim, could be more realistic.

Of the three choices, Tim Behrens' 1990 rendition for Books in Motion is the best. It is a fully voiced, virtuoso performance. His Huckleberry is the youngest sounding, therefore, the most believable. His pacing is good, as is his understanding of the novel, and his sincerity in transmitting it excites the listener. When Jim scolds Huck for playing a humiliating practical joke on him, the listener feels shame and embarrassment for Huck. Behrens' acting ability carries the day, and we are treated to the feast of voices and dialects that make up, in large part, the magic of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Choosing the best in audiobooks is a strange business. After a tape or two, a certain bonding almost always occurs between the listener and a talented oral interpreter. The specific voice becomes an important part of one's enjoyment of the story. While Michael Pritchard's speedy and mostly flat reading adequately captures the plot, Norman Dietz's more professional performance offers us interpretive substance through his credible and kind Huckleberry. But it is Tim Behrens' versatile and inspired performance that captures most completely the soul of this great novel. — Preston Wilson

*Preston Wilson is an English teacher of 20 years experience at Auburn High School, Auburn, NY. He is a founding member of The Society for Performance Literature, an advocacy group for the acceptance of oral interpretation of literature as a newly developing and legitimate art form.*



## Reviewers Wanted

Librarians, authors, educators, theater and media professionals all review for *AudioFile*. Each brings a unique perspective to the commentary. Interested in reviewing? Join us! Please contact Robin Whitten at 207-774-7563 for more information.

### SAVAGE INEQUALITIES

Jonathan Kozol

Read by Jack Winston

Brilliance, 1991

Six cassettes / 8 hrs.

Unabridged Nonfiction Book pak

\$73.25 ISBN 1-56100-086-8

Kozol's shocking exposé of inequities in the funding of our public schools contrasts white suburban schools with those serving black and Hispanic populations. Interviews with students, teachers and school administrators add eloquent testimony to Kozol's disturbing presentation of facts. Narration by Jack Winston is clear and brisk, but the pace is unrelenting, with little pause for transition between scenes or chapters. Winston's cool, detached voice contrasts with Kozol's impassioned and outraged message. The sheer repetition and magnitude of Kozol's damning evidence is numbing; the narration gives no relief. Powerful medicine, most easily taken in small doses. Music signalling tape changes is jarringly inappropriate. *D.L.*

### GRATITUDE

William F. Buckley

Read by Walter Lawrence

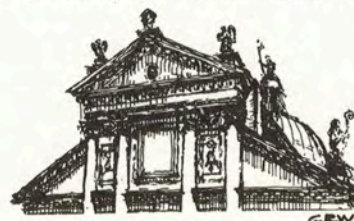
Books on Tape, 1992

Five cassettes / 5 hrs.

Unabridged Nonfiction Book pak

\$40.00 Rental \$14.50 #2945

Buckley offers a reasonable proposal for a national service program without jail or criminal penalties. Narrator Lawrence reads with a slow and careful announcer's voice; one wishes Buckley were reading this one himself. Books on Tape does its usual quality job with formatting, packaging and tape-turning instructions. The reader repeats the last sentence at such times, so you're sure you haven't missed anything. Popular nonfiction collections will appreciate *Gratitude*, and the topic is likely to prove timely in the years ahead. *D.W.*





**THE BEST OF DANIEL  
PINKWATER: EVERYDAY LIFE**

*Daniel Pinkwater*  
Read by Daniel Pinkwater  
Dove Audio, 1987  
One cassette / 1 hr.  
Commentary Airbox pak  
\$10.95 ISBN 1-55800-341-X

These commentaries by one of National Public Radio's most amusing contributors are short and humorous. Most of the segments were presented on NPR's *All Things Considered*. They are delivered in a direct, friendly, informal manner, as if the author were speaking to the listener. Tape quality is good, and this collection is perfect for the audio format. The author enlivens several pieces by contrasting his own voice with the peculiar accent he gives his father. This selection could be addictive; it stands up well on the fifth or sixth listening—if one is tuned in to Pinkwater's off-the-wall thinking. C.R.W.

**TWENTY YEARS WITH NPR**

*National Public Radio*  
Read by Susan Stamberg et al.  
Dove Audio, 1990  
Two cassettes / 2 hrs.  
Commentary Airbox pak  
\$15.95 ISBN 1-55800-338-X

A time capsule of events and interviews typical of the coverage National Public Radio gave the news in its first twenty years of existence is presented in this collection. Susan Stamberg lays the groundwork in her introduction and links the contributions of the varied, non-traditional radio voices. Selections range from technical ones (Bob Edwards on interviewing) to current history (Scott Simon at a Nazi rally) to the frivolous (Arizona Sold to Canada: An April Fools' report). The selections, even if they don't always work, show the possibilities radio offers as "theater of the mind." Sound effects are well integrated into presentations, and one senses the growing sophistication in NPR's production as years go by. This collection would be valuable to students of current history, journalism or broadcasting. C.R.W.

**THE PEOPLE & THE STONES:  
SELECTED POEMS**

*William Carlos Williams*  
Read by William Carlos Williams  
Watershed Tapes, 1991  
One cassette / 1 hr.  
Anthology Poetry Repak  
\$10.95 ISBN 1-55758-021-9

Readings made by the poet between 1942 and 1955 at the Library of Congress, the 92nd St. Y and elsewhere are presented. Though of varying sound quality, the selection is eclectic, containing staples like "Tract" and excerpts from *Paterson*, as well as lesser-known poems like "Eyeglasses." The poems are arranged in order of composition and reveal a voice that, at its best, is clipped and precise, yet full of tenderness. At his worst, Williams can sound thin, nasal and unintentionally comic. If the listener can overlook the static in this old recording and appreciate the charm and immediacy of a dog's bark punctuating a line of verse, these readings by an American original are a treasure. J.F.P.



**A SWINGER OF BIRCHES**

*Robert Frost*  
Read by Clifton Fadiman  
Stemmer House, 1986  
One cassette / 1 hr.  
Anthology Poetry Repak  
\$8.95 ISBN 0-88045-099-1

Clifton Fadiman narrates this selection with his rich, yet melodic voice and gives life to the short poems of this well-known poet. The pace is slow enough to savor the words and implications, yet it moves along to maintain the continuity of thought. An occasional sound effect pertinent to the poem, such as bells or birds, brings additional life to the presentation. Adults will appreciate the introduction. If children of elementary age are to appreciate and enjoy this, the book should be used with the tape. This would be an excellent choice for a family auto trip. P.L.

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Cary Memorial Library, Maine

## HARD PRAYER

Galway Kinnell

Read by Galway Kinnell

Watershed Tapes, 1991

One cassette / 63 min.

Anthology Poetry Repak

\$10.95 ISBN 1-55758-135-5

## GALWAY KINNELL READS

### WALT WHITMAN

Walt Whitman

Read by Galway Kinnell

Watershed Tapes, 1991

One cassette / 1 hr.

Anthology Poetry Repak

\$10.95

These two recordings by one of America's foremost poets try to make a case for the prayerful, incantatory nature of poetry. Galway Kinnell's resonant voice emphasizes the materiality of images, and his heavy, tremulous cadences can be dramatic. The live recordings of "The Porcupine" and "The Bear" in *Hard Prayer* are chilling. Away from a live audience, however, Kinnell grows melodramatic, as if every poem inspires awe. Perhaps this manner is sufficiently suited to his own work though its elongations overwhelm the humor and natural speech rhythms even there. In his reading of Whitman the style simply calls attention to itself. Kinnell misses the less solemn virtues of *Song of Myself* and in the six shorter selections. *J.F.P.*

## BEST LOVED STORIES, VOL.1

Told by Elizabeth Ellis,

Jay O'Callahan et al.

August House, 1991

One cassette / 1 hr.

Storytelling Airbox pak

\$9.98 ISBN 1-879991-04-7

This anthology presents a delightful rendition of stories by five storytellers. The charm of each story is the teller's desire to woo us into loving his protagonist. Their exuberance and dialects are spellbinding. However, Elizabeth Ellis' halting narration and stretching for words breaks the rhythm of her piece. Jay O'Callahan's "Orange Cheeks" is a winsome episode in a small boy's life, and the rest of the tape gets better and better. *J.P.*

## HAIRY MAN

Told by David Holt

High Windy Audio, 1981

One cassette / 44 min.

Storytelling Repak

\$9.98 ISBN 0-942303-008

Southern storyteller David Holt delivers six down-home tales with lively, if uneven, style. The original tales of side one have integrity and a distinct southern flavor. The traditional tales and adaptations, including "Wiley and the Hairy Man," are told with uneven voice and bothersome changes in the story line. There is music throughout, arranged and performed by Holt. Particularly engaging is the story of "Groundhog and the Hogaphone," but overall the stories are not memorable. *P.S.B.*

## FLYING AFRICANS

Told by Alice McGill

Earwig Music, 1988

One cassette / 50 min.

Storytelling Repak

\$9.00 #4913c

McGill presents a superb collection of both African and African American folktales intertwined with original stories drawn from her African American heritage. Included are two Brer Rabbit tales. Interspersed with the stories are short songs. McGill's voice, husky and haunting, is an instrument used to full effect in both story and song. In a style reminiscent of Susan Klein, McGill employs voice modulation and differentiates characters with vocal sound effects. A good choice for libraries seeking multicultural audio materials for children. *T.B.*

## VILLAGE HEROES

Told by Jay O'Callahan

Artana Productions, 1991

Two cassettes / 1 hr. 44 min.

Storytelling Repak

\$18.00

Who are *your* village heroes? Under the spell of O'Callahan, the listener is transported to meet and understand many characters. Careful listening is required to follow the episodic tales; each is

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### THIRTEEN DOORS





filled with men, women and children whose voices maintain distinction, clarity and character. For a storyteller to carry through successfully such a sustained live performance is testament to his familiarity with and love of his material. Music and sound effects harmonize perfectly with the narrative. At times, the live recording is difficult to follow; however, the addition of audience reaction enhances the listening. *P.S.B.*

### **YOUNG BRER RABBIT**

*Jacqueline Schachter Weiss*

*Told by Eartha Kitt*

Stemmer House, 1986

One cassette / 1 hr. 15 min.

Storytelling Repak

\$8.95 #33-392-24

These lesser known stories of Brer Rabbit are performed in the silky and sinister tones of Eartha Kitt. They are magnificently done in standard English (not in the more familiar dialect of Joel Chandler Harris). Kitt seems to have enjoyed every minute of the lore of Brer Rabbit's tricks and triumphs over Sis Jaguar, Brer Tiger and Sis Cockroach, to mention only a few. A few bars of music separate each story and give the listener a chance to prepare for the next treat. The fifteen short tales will amuse and entrance listeners of any age. *P.L.*

### **NORFOLK TALES**

*Told by Bobby Norfolk*

Earwig Music, 1989

One cassette / 1 hr. 45 min.

Storytelling Repak

\$9.00 #4917c

Norfolk, a lively teller of traditional tales, uses African dialect, quirky touches of humor, suspense and repetition effectively in this collection of children's tales. The five fast-paced stories are well delivered with frequent vocal sound effects, sure to give rise to giggles and occasional belly laughs. In addition, the inclusion of two "Anansi the Spider" tales will appeal to librarians and teachers looking for recordings of African folktales. The length of the stories make this selection most appropriate for children beyond first grade. *T.B.*

### **HISTORY** *Continued from Cover*

Audiobooks as a form of spoken-word recording had existed for some time in the Library of Congress Talking Books program for the blind and disabled, but the first commercial development began with the founding of Books on Tape by Duvall Hecht in 1977. In 1973 Hecht conceived the idea of having someone read a complete book for him onto audio cassettes so that he (and others) could listen to the book while commuting. This informal arrangement evolved into a rental business that now has more than 87,500 rental customers and ships more than 2,000 rental books a day.

Competition in audiobooks was not long in coming, and it came from both sides of the Atlantic. In 1979 Recorded Books was founded by Henry Trentman to compete with Books on Tape, not only in audio rental, but also in the sale of audiobooks to libraries. In the U.K. Ted Hudson issued the first Chivers Audio Books to enhance its niche as a supplier of spoken-word materials to libraries. G.K. Hall introduced Chivers into the U.S. market in 1983. A third competitor in the rental area, Blackstone Audio Books (formerly Classics on Tape) emerged in 1988.

Beyond these first competitors, a number of other American publishers of unabridged audiobooks have emerged. Both Listening Library and Spoken Arts, who had published stories on tape as mixed media publications, began to collect their stories and issue unabridged novels as well. Audio Book Contractors was founded by a professional reader, Flo Gibson, who decided to publish her own recordings of classics. Both Dercum Press and Brilliance Corporation began trying to develop a bookstore market for unabridged recordings but are now developing specially packaged versions for libraries. In the U.K. growth of competitors came from publishers in Large Print: Isis, Ulverscroft Soundings, and Story Sound presented small lists which are now all distributed in the U.S.




## **Evaluation Policy**

*AudioFile* reviews unabridged and abridged publications, commentary and dramatizations in the audio format.

*AudioFile* reviews the following aspects of audio presentations:

- 1) Narrative voice and style
- 2) Vocal characterizations
- 3) Appropriateness for audio format
- 4) Enhancement of the text

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From 1984 to 1986 a great surge of interest in abridged recordings for the bookstore market took place on the part of the major American trade publishers. Hal Newman introduced the Listen for Pleasure abridged list to American bookstores with great success, and in short order many trade book publishers entered the fray. In 1987-88 an industry shakeout occurred: too many audios were being released, and returned merchandise destroyed profits. Since then the trade publishers have reorganized their audio programs and founded the Audio Publishers Association.

The growth of audio for bookstores has made people aware of audiobooks. In public library budgets, audiobooks are a growing category, often the fastest growing. Restraining factors in growth  
*HISTORY Continued on Back Page*



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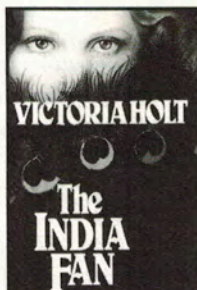
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### PLAY BUTTON *Continued From Cover*

characterizations? If a narrator employs this technique, a style termed "fully voiced" by Preston Hoffman, how successful are these voices? Are foreign accents reasonably accurate, cross-gender depictions believable, characters convincing? *AudioFile* will identify the presentations as dramatizations, multi-reader narrations, original commentary or storytelling. *Vocal descriptions* will be included. Is the narrator's voice resonant, soothing or compelling? How does the narrative pace mesh with the story? Much improvement is evident in the overall quality of recordings; comments will be made in this area when a reviewer feels that high standards of fidelity and clarity are not met. *Text issues* will also be considered. A designation of "unabridged" speaks for itself, while "abridgment" encompasses a wide range of alterations to the original. Is the abridgment a success on its own? Dramatizations, adaptations and other forms of presentation will be judged as just that: adaptations. The addition of *non-text material* — music or sound effects, introductions, promotions and instructions — will be addressed.

Overall, does the audio version enhance as well as present the original text? This key point will be our focus. In one hundred words *AudioFile* will answer this question in articulate, succinct form. Stay tuned. — Robin F. Whitten

### HISTORY *Continued from Page 11*

are the relatively high cost of audiobooks on cassette and the problems they present librarians: namely the repair and replacement of cassettes and cases. Audio patrons bring into the library a valuable constituency, who may not normally patronize the library or support library funding. As patron demand often drives funding, every indication is that audiobooks will continue to gain their share of library acquisition budgets.

The future of audiobooks now lies with the development of the compact disc. Compact discs could potentially solve current problems by providing up to twenty hours of monaural audio on a single low-cost disc. CD's have begun to show up in automotive sound systems, and once they are present in significant numbers, the demand for audiobooks on CD will soar. With CD's, both librarian and listener can look forward to both better sound and lower prices. — Thomas T. Beeler

*Thomas T. Beeler was president of G.K. Hall from 1978 to 1991. His avid interest in audio led him to introduce the Chivers Audio Books program to American libraries in 1983.*

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