

## Interview with William Dufri's Podcast

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Welcome to the stories2music podcast. I'm your host, Kathy Matthes.

I bet you've seen them. They're everywhere . . . people with ear buds. You see them on the street, on the subway, on the bus, at the gym, at the park, at the beach, and in the library. They appear to be in a trance, listening so intently that they are oblivious to the world around them. They seem captivated, and somewhat mad, as various expressions flit across their faces. Is it the invasion of the body snatchers? No! They are listening to full-cast audiobooks.

Why are they so captivating? Well, it's because they are different from audiobooks which generally have one narrator who reads the book, word-for-word, as it is written. The narrator often uses different voices for different characters. However, a full cast audiobook has a narrator and voice actors to play the different characters. If the book is rewritten as a dramatization (or audio drama), it includes voice actors, music and sound effects—just like the old radio shows. Anyone remember Orson Wells 1938 War of the World's Halloween broadcast? It was so real that it caused a mass panic!

It did this because a well-written and produced audio drama will enable the listener to become immersed in the story. Immersion happens by creating images in the listener's imagination—it's like watching a movie in the mind. According to Bill Dufri's, consummate voice actor, director and producer of audiobooks and audio dramas, "The listener should be fully immersed, remain in the story, and never be jolted out by questions about what is going on."

In this podcast, we are fortunate to have Bill Dufri share his insights about audio dramas.

William Dufri's began his audio career with audiobooks, film and animation dubbing, and language tapes in London, where he resided for 13 years. During this time, he had the privilege of sharing the microphone in a number of BBC Radio plays with Kathleen Turner, Sharon Gless, Stockard Channing, and Helena Bonham-Carter. He worked with legendary director Dirk Maggs on his audio drama productions of The Amazing Spider-Man (where he voiced the title role of Peter Parker), as well as Judge Dredd, Voyage, and An American Werewolf in London. He is best known as the original voice of Bob the Builder in the popular children's show Bob The Builder for the US and Canada (series 1-9).

These experiences led Dufri's to co-found the audio production company The Story Circle, Ltd in the UK, which produced audio theatre programs for numerous publishers. Upon returning to the US, Dufri's founded Mind's Eye Productions, and co-founded AudioComics and Dagaz Media, for all of which he has been producer, director, actor and sound designer. He is the director/producer of a number of audio drama productions, including X-FILES: "Cold Cases and Stolen Lives" (with Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny), Locke & Key, Titanium Rain, Starstruck, and Midnight Matinees.

With over a thousand audiobooks to his credit, Bill is a multiple finalist for the Audio Publisher's Association's prestigious Audie Award (winning in 2012 for *The Murder of the Century*), and has garnered numerous Golden Earphones Awards through *AudioFile Magazine*.

Welcome, Bill, to the stories2music podcast.

Hey, Kathy

**Kathy:** In an article in *AudioFile Magazine*, it says that you embody “a passion for audio.”

- **Why does sound fascinate you as a storyteller?**

**William Dufri:** Why does sound fascinate me as a storyteller? First off, I would have to say that sound has always fascinated me. I remember back in the third grade when I was supposed to do a book report on Magellan, the Spanish explorer who circumnavigated the world. I remember putting it together and using a tape recorder and an album of bullfighting music as a backdrop, so I could actually have some music underscoring my report. From a very early age, I felt that actually doing something with storytelling—however it would be enhanced—could bring something to life in a different manner than what my fellow students and I were accustomed to—just a dry sort of rehash of material. I wanted to do something different.

I grew up with old albums that my parents had of old time radio—***Light's Out***, ***The Shadow***—all of those ***Classics***. I recall how I felt lying in the dark with one of these pieces playing—you know, the cinema of the mind. Everything in my mind's eye was coming to life in a way that I controlled and created based on the voices and the storytelling that I heard. I was definitely drawn in.

As humans, we were first told stories. It was an oral tradition. Homer's ***The Odyssey*** and ***The Iliad*** and balladeers used the spoken word and that is our heritage. There's a reason why people love being told stories around the campfire.

Stephen King actually wrote in ***Danse Macabre*** how he felt—storytelling like with audio dramas. There's a difference between audio and cinema. When you're sitting in a cinema, and you know there's something behind the door, and it's just banging on the door. You're sitting there terrified of what it might be, and suddenly the door swings open, and there's this 10-foot monster and ahhhhh, everybody screams. Then there's a relief—at least it wasn't 15 feet! However, with audio, in the mind's eye, it can be as horrendous and as grotesque and as frightening as you can bear, so there's really something very, very special about audio—something that isn't able to be captured on the visual medium.

Audio dramas, and I would daresay even with simply a single-voice narrative, can be very, very powerful as long as the storyteller is accomplished and experienced enough to know that they should be speaking to one person, not to an audience. It's not a stage performance when you're telling a story. It's to one person—whatever has those earbuds or headphones. They need to make that one person feel that he or she alone is being told the story. They're not sharing it.

Sound has always fascinated me as a storyteller, and especially music. I have over 3,000 CDs. I'm a real audiophile, and I would say that's one of the things about telling a story. It has to have rhythm

and flow like music. I'll always be taken out of a story if there's something like a mispronunciation of a word or a haltingly-delivered phrase, so like music, it has to have that flow and melody and just be able to transport us without having any bad notes.

**Kathy:** Thanks, Bill. That makes a great deal of sense.

You've got extensive experience doing single-narrator audiobooks where you perform all of the characters in different voices. In your 2013 *The Gilded Earlobe* interview, you said, "As an actor, I sorta 'see' the characters in a 'filmic' way."

- **Can you explain what the "filmic way" is and how it helps you develop the voices for various characters?**

**William Dufris:** I've actually started to be a little more nuanced in my characterizations, but for the most part, when I read something, I hear voices in my head—in a way that doesn't require medication. I people my mind's eye with characters. To create a distinctly-voiced character, I would actually borrow from classic actors such as [Kirk Douglas](#) or [Sydney Greenstreet](#) for my male characters. I would choose actors who had very distinct sounds and then just alter it somewhat.

For example, there's my [Jimmy Stewart](#) kind-of-voice, and I use him for my older characters. Depending on the character, I would decide which actor would I have portrayed for this particular character if this were a film. It would help me picture the character as that actor and help and, as a result, I would find that voice and utilize it.

When I use a "filmic way," I would hear the character's voices in my head. I would also actually see how the author chose to detail a particular scene, environment or landscape in my mind as I read it. That's what I hope to achieve when I am reading aloud for an audiobook—that the listener can actually visualize whatever is being described.

**Kathy:** Thanks for the demonstration of the various voices. This brings us to Dr. Emma Roderó's ideas about how intonation, speech rate, high vs. low pitch, clear vs. rough voice, word accent in the sentence and rhythm all affect the listeners' attention and comprehension in audio.

- **Why are these techniques important for voice actors and how can they be used in full-cast audiobooks?**

**William Dufris:** For full-cast audiobooks, the most important thing is honesty in the delivery. It's got to have that sense of [cinéma vérité](#). I work hard to achieve a sense of realism, and portrayals of characters by my actors are the same way that they would act in front of a camera. I used various microphone techniques, such as using a binaural mic, that allow for more literal acting by the actors. They can move around the microphone and interact with each other.

When we did [Locke & Key](#), that was all recorded on location. It was a field recording that allowed us to go to the environments that were required by the script. If there was a beach scene, we were literally on the beach. We utilized an entire house for all the various rooms that were called for in the various scenes in this particular script. It was a 13-and-a-half hour production that was recorded in

two weeks. It was basically recorded in the way that we would have done it had it been a film, only without the cameras.

Other times, it's different. For the [X-Files](#), we did that all in front of stationary mics, but the actors still had the ability to move around and physicalize their acting in a way that allowed for a more realistic and believable delivery. This is first and foremost in my mind at all times when I'm recording an audio drama with actors. I'm also always in the booth, the acting area or the recording area with them, so I can help them physicalize it. I might give them a slight shove or shake their shoulders like they're being grabbed by another character. I'll also provide Foley sound effects.

In terms Emma Rodero's ideas, speech patterns do affect the way I listen and enjoy an audiobook. I like to be more than just a monotonic delivery. There's definitely fluidity to the delivery that I expect from an experienced reader/narrator. It doesn't always have to have a clear vs. rough voice as long as the person is able to relay a story—that's always the most important quality for me. Surprising me is always a nice thing. I think listeners do not want to be lulled to sleep by a delivery so uniform and predictable that they can just forget what they're hearing. The sound of the voice itself should not put the reader into a soporific state. I like to find those points where you can actually jump out. A reader/narrator should always be making discoveries about the material so that they are only just a couple of beats ahead of the listener and relaying what they're actually seeing or discovering as it happens.

**Kathy:** That's great insight about how to work with the voice actors and how to make it real for them. One way to make it real for the listener is the way that audio drama scripts use a specific format that cues the listener about the environment, which characters are speaking and what actions are being done (sound effects also help with these cues). Novels are not written to cue the listener in this way.

- **Should the full-cast audiobooks be rewritten as dramatizations to provide these cues? If not, is it harder for listeners to understand what is happening in the novel if it is read verbatim by the voice actors?**

**William Dufres:** When we did *Locke & Key*, I preferred to have a script that actually detailed everything in a way that didn't require a narrator to give guidelines to the action that's unfolding in an audio drama. Sometimes, it's really difficult to do this all the way through an audio drama. Lacking that visual element, certain actions can take place that are tricky to convey without some sort of explanation as to what has just transpired or is going on.

Alluding back to *Locke & Key*, there were occasions, such as fight scene, where the listener had to be made aware of what characters were in the struggle and who was victorious. We actually did create for our narrator, who opened up each scene, a little blurb just to convey what was happening or had gone down. However, with *X-Files*, we were able to forgo that technique. It's hit or miss. It's something that may have to be used, but I don't find it distracting in any way. Whatever allows the listener to become fully immersed themselves and not even question what's going on—that's our goal. The listeners should never be jolted out of the listening experience by having a question that pops up in their heads about what is happening. That should never, never happen. The listener should always remain immersed in the story.

**Kathy:** Do full-cast audiobooks create more immersion and transference into the story than one-author narrated books? If so, why?

**William Dufri:** Well, yes, they do create more emotion because you're talking about sound effects and music. We always seek to create an audio drama that is essentially a movie or TV show of the mind. It's akin to listening to a TV show or a film without the visuals. It's as though you were in the other room and you heard something going on, but you understood everything that was happening without actually watching. It's a completely different experience to that of a single narrator, and one that is just a very subjective choice.

I happened to love audio books. I record audio books as a narrator. I produce audio books as a director/ producer, and I listen to audiobooks constantly. My iPhone is packed with audiobooks. I listen to more audiobooks than I listen to audio dramas because I don't find that many audio dramas are that engaging. There are very, very few that spring to mind. Anything by **Dirk Maggs** is amazing. He is not only a dear friend of mine but a mentor and is one of the greatest audiobook Audio Drama producers out there. John Dryden—formerly with the BBC—is also another very, very highly acclaimed audio drama producer. His **Tumanbay** series is just sublime. It's one of the best things I've ever heard. **Roger Gregg** has or had a company called Crazy Dog Theater. His stuff is just so twisted and fun and clever and brilliantly produced.

I was also very fortunate to be an actor a number of Dirk's productions. He did **Independence Day**. We started off with a real time unfolding of events that were taking place in space—Earth's orbit— and was being relayed to a radio station—Radio 4 in London. He had the real DJ from Radio 4 portraying himself. He had an astronomer portraying himself up in an AWACS plane receiving these transmissions from deep space and being broadcast down to the Earth radio station.

Then the attack comes. The DJ is trying to report what's going on. He goes out onto the fire escape and witnesses the attack from the aliens. The destruction of London is taking place all around him and is approaching the BBC broadcasting house. He was trying to get back in through the window and escape this conflagration, and then it hits and then everything goes quiet. There were seconds— I don't know how many seconds—but it just seemed to go on interminably that there was just dead silence and then boom! We went straight from that to an audio drama—jet fighter, music, pilots sitting and clicking away. The use of silence in between the two parts was amazing. I never heard anything quite like that. Trying to find those points where you can actually have a beat—those spaces where there's nothing happening—allows the listener to fill in what's going on.

The single-narrator audiobooks vs. audio dramas is a subjective question—they both have equal value.

**Kathy:** Thanks, Bill, for taking the time to talk with us about your experiences and methods.

Clearly, the power of full-cast audiobooks to draw the reader into the story might explain why all of those ear bud-wearing people are captivated by their audiobooks. Why not join them? Listen to a full-cast audio book today! You can also find Bill Dufri's many extraordinary audiobooks on Amazon.

And don't forget to visit the stories2music website for bite sized flash fiction stories with music and sound effects at [www.stories2music.com](http://www.stories2music.com). See you next time!

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**Credits**

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