

## Transcript for the Interview with Professor Jesse Keller

stories2music Podcast #6 (03/24/23)

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### **Kathy**

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

As you probably already know if you've read my bio on my stories2music website, I'm an online college teacher who experimented with Audacity back in 2011 and ended up creating my stories2music project. I love taking professional development classes at local community colleges and many of them resulted in new features for stories2music such as the blog, podcasts, interview, social media, and research about audio stories, film music, sound effects, and audio dramas.

In fall 2021, I took the Acting for Radio and Voice Overs class online at San Diego Mesa College with Professor Jesse Keller, which was an absolute blast! We got to do a PSA commercial, a character voice, an audiobook narration excerpt, and a short radio drama. I, of course, did an excerpt from s2m audio story, The Rescue . . . but more on that experience later.

In 2023, I took a Creative Non-Fiction class, and one project was a narrative journalism research paper. I decided to research more about how radio/audio dramas create immersion in the listener's imagination. I had to do some interviews for the paper, so I contacted Professor Jesse Keller from my Voice Overs class to pick his brain about voice acting and radio dramas, and this is what he had to say!

### **Prof. Keller**

Hello there, this is Jesse Keller. I am a writer, director, filmmaker, and professor of filmmaking at San Diego Mesa College, where I also teach acting for radio and voiceover.

### **Kathy**

Since radio dramas tell story through sound, how is voice acting different from other types of voiceovers?

### **Prof. Keller**

Really, the answer to that question--voice acting as opposed to other voiceover types like audio books or like commercial performance or narration for documentaries--voice acting, the difference is the acting. And the techniques that are involved, are techniques that are relevant to any actor, so if a voice performer is interested in voice acting in the sort of radio dramas, theater

of the mind, or voice acting for animation, that sort of thing, it's good to study acting. It's good to learn about how to build a character, how to learn, how to pursue objectives as a performer, how to think about playing an action. These are all techniques and terminology from the world of acting, of stage acting, screen acting, and they are designed to help the performer sort of live and experience the reality of the moment for the character. So I would say that's the difference between voice acting and other types of vocal performance.

### **Kathy**

Since radio dramas are theater of the mind, how can voice acting help immerse the listener in the story? Are there any techniques that are important to use?

### **Prof. Keller**

That relates to what I just said. The way that voice acting helps to immerse a listener in the story is exactly the same way that acting on a stage or in a screen, you know, in a screen performance helps immerse the audience in that story and that is by playing, by acting the reality of the moment to play a moment with high stakes your character cares deeply about whatever is going on. Stakes, stakes are important. Then actions and objectives your character wants something. Every character in a piece wants something and goes about getting it somehow. That's the action. How does your character go about getting the thing that they so badly want?

So these acting techniques are, they're really sort of central to voice acting and performance as well. There's really not a lot of separation between how you might approach playing a character on a screen, playing a character on a stage, or playing a character in front of a microphone with only your voice.

### **Kathy**

What are some good and bad practices for effective voiceovers in radio dramas?

### **Prof. Keller**

The good and bad practices. Well, first off, you need as a good practice--and more so than if you're playing something on stage or on a screen and in front of the camera--the good practice is you need to engage your imagination because if you're delivering a performance for an audio podcast drama, or if you're delivering a performance that will become the basis of animation, you are in the studio, usually alone with the director or someone else reading lines opposite you. Maybe you're lucky enough to have some other actors present as well that you can actually play off of, but you know, if your character is, you know, a lion that's pursuing a gazelle, you have to engage your imagination there. It's something that the great acting teacher Sanford Meisner calls

the magic “if.” You know, if I was this character in this situation, how would I behave? You have to engage the imagination in that magic “if.” That's one of the good practices.

Bad practices for voice over and radio drama. I think that bad, especially for radio drama, this is what we're talking about when you're acting and playing a character. When you get too aware of yourself and aware of your voice and are actually trying too hard to do something. I think that can be the bad practice in this particular sort of scenario. It's at its best when you sort of forget that you're giving a performance and your focus is on what you're doing. “I'm trying to catch this gazelle, and I need to catch the gazelle. Otherwise, my cubs will not eat.” You know, I'm going back to this lion thing. But the moment you get conscious of, I'm going to try to do it, you know, I'm going to make my voice higher and do it this way. That's all great for building a character, changing your voice. These are all good and important things, but then when the moment comes to record, you want to internalize all of that and give a performance that has that magic “if.” If that magic reality of the scene.

## **Kathy**

What are three pieces of advice that you would give to voice over actors and radio dramas?

## **Prof. Keller**

The three pieces of advice would be: Play the reality of the scene. Play, Play, play an action. This is advice to any actor. What are you trying to do? I'm trying to get that person to give me the thing that I want, and I'm going to bully them into doing it. That's a playable action. I want to get that person to give me what they want. I'm going to seduce them into doing what I want or so the way that you go about getting something play an action that's always good advice for any actor.

Another piece of advice for actors and radio dramas. Let's see. Don't do it the same every time. Keep it alive. If you're asked to do another take. You know, however you think about it. This is another kind of acting technique. Follow the impulse, so every line starts with an impulse inside of you to say something. And you feel that impulse come, and then you let it out. And that will change every time you perform it, so the impulse will come out a little differently and it will change how you say that line. So follow the impulse and let it be different every time. That's good advice.

Let's see a third piece of advice for voice of actors is be a good collaborator. Work with your fellow actors. If you have the benefit of playing off of another actor, listen to them, give them your attention. Be a good collaborator, work with your director. Try to give, you know, a director will give you notes. Try to give them what they want and work together. You know, there be the impulse to say, well, I'm doing it the right way already, and I'm going to argue back with the director about what they're suggesting. You know, it's the old improv technique of “yes and.” Be a good collaborator. Try to try to make lift everybody up. Not just yourself.

## **Kathy**

Anything else that you want to add?

## **Prof. Keller**

I would just add that I think it's an exciting time for this type of voice performance. I'm working on something right now. So I've actually just released the final episode in the first season of a podcast audio fiction series that I wrote and produced. I adapted a bunch of classic horror stories from like the teens and 20s and even the late 1800s, stories by people like HP Lovecraft, and Algernon Blackwood and Edgar Allen Poe even. And we adapted, I wrote the adaptations for these stories as though they were contemporary documentaries, so it's all presented in the guise of a highly-produced audio documentary made today, but it's full of performance by a bunch of great actors that I know. We have dozens of actors that have worked on this, and that that we just released the final episode of our first season. It's called "Keeping the Bones," and we're working on season 2 right now, but anywhere that you find podcasts, or at [keepingthebones.com](http://keepingthebones.com), you can hear all 10 episodes of our first season.

Because of the podcast, the world . . . there was sort of a golden age of radio drama and the, you know, call it 1930s or so. When radio was really big before the coming of television, and there was a lot of audio-only fictional storytelling going on, you know, *War of the World*, *The Shadow* - this sort of classic era. It's something that never really went away to the same degree after the coming of television in Great Britain. I'm a huge fan of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* from I believe the 70s, right? That there's still more audio fiction, storytelling, audio only, that's produced by the BBC and then Britain, but I think we're kind of, we're coming into a new time when there's a lot of opportunity out there to do this stuff, and it's just getting going again in the world of podcasts specifically.

So that's my last bit of stuff that I want to add, which is: It's a great time to be doing this, and I hope that everybody. You know, if you have ideas, if you have projects get out there and make them. That's why I'm working on one is because it's, you know, as a screenwriter, you can write, you know, a giant spaceship flies over and crashes into the mountain. Well, you just wrote, you know, \$1,000,000 on screen with the special effects.

If you're producing a podcast, you can say that you'll do it in dialogue and sound effects, and all it takes you is the time of recording and producing that, so it's going to be a cool time for audio storytelling in the future. That's my prediction.

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**Kathy**

Thanks so much for taking the time to do this interview! I really appreciate it!

**Prof. Keller**

I'm glad to have been able to be a part of this, Kathy, thanks for inviting me. And let's stay in touch.

**Kathy**

Will do! Bye for now!

This interview with Professor Keller provided some great information for my research paper: The Immersive Power of Radio Dramas. If you're interested in reading it, you can find it in the research section of my stories2music website at [www.stories2music.com](http://www.stories2music.com).

See ya next time!

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