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AUDIOBOOKS...

Something for everyone

Audiobooks have converted these broadcasts into audiobooks. These are suitable for the private collector in that they are affordable. More importantly it is important to

Audiobooks - the solution to maximizing your time, keeping up your reading and savouring a sense of satisfaction in today's frenzied world.

Spoken word on audio

There is, literally, something for everyone: not only in the range of material available but the presentation of the material and the formats on which it is offered:

- Complete and unabridged readings of books: single voice recordings/multi-voice recordings.
- Books adapted for audio: dramatised (usually radio broadcast material) or abridged.
- Combination packs: matching book and CD (or cassette). This is a popular concept for children's material.

Editions

Library editions are packaged in sturdy packaging designed to withstand the rigours of a multi-user situation. The publishers of library editions always provide an after-sales maintenance service (where replacement cassettes and CDs, as well as the moulded covers, are available at nominal charges). Trade editions are designed to be marketed through bookstores, et cetera. They are aimed at the private collector. These editions are packaged in perspex cases more suitable to the individual owner and are made up of two, three or four CDs or cassettes. (There is no after-sales service for trade editions.)

Format

Audiobooks are presented mainly in two formats, cassette tape and CD. However, audiobooks on MP3 are being introduced.

Audiobook selection

There are four major factors for the librarian to take into consideration when building the audiobook collection in the library: the cost, the format, whether the supplier provides an after-sales maintenance service and, of course, the range of titles that will appeal to the community. The range of user of the audiobook section in a library will be very diverse and the motivation for listening to audiobooks as varied. Some people want to enjoy a good story on audio and will listen at every opportunity, others will listen only in the car, for example, and will choose an audiobook that ties in with the duration of a specific journey.

Choices and examples

Take Charles Dickens' **Great expectations**. Within the BBC Audiobooks lists, this title is available in three formats:

- a) the complete and unabridged library edition on cassette (BBC Cover to Cover), (with an after-sales maintenance service);
- b) the complete and unabridged edition on MP3 (BBC Cover to Cover);
- c) the dramatised trade edition on cassette (BBC Radio Collection) (no after-sales maintenance service).

Other publishers offer abridged renderings of the same title, one such publisher being Naxos: an abridged trade edition on either CD or cassette (no after-sales maintenance service). Louis de Berniere's **Captain Corelli's mandolin** is another case in point where there is a variety of different editions. Again, the complete and unabridged library edition is ideal for the library because of the after-sales maintenance facility. Or, as a contrast, Lyn Truss' **Cutting a dash (Eats shoots and leaves)**. The printed book appeared in the second half of 2003, but what many people do not realise is that the book appeared after the success of the BBC Radio programmes. BBC Audiobooks published the programmes in their BBC Radio Collection imprint. There is a library edition available on both CD and cassette.

Complete and unabridged audiobooks

For the purist there really is no choice. The recorded book has to be available in its entirety and what better way to access a book when time is at a premium. However, unless the book is being studied and needs to be listened to again and again, cost discourages private ownership; which is where the community library plays a role. Because of the multi-user situation in the library and because of the after-sales service the investment is worthwhile.

Adapted for audio

There are those listeners who want to read the classics and other novels but are quite accepting of adapted editions. Adapted can mean either dramatised or abridged. The BBC Radio Collection is a direct conversion of the broadcast material. Radio plays on BBC are presented usually on two, three or four CDs or cassettes and are affordable, therefore, to the private collector. It may not be the full book but this makes for great entertainment. Similarly, BBC radio's *Book at bedtime* programme offers abridged versions of books which are serialised. BBC

know that BBC Audiobooks now present their *Radio Collection* series in library editions as well as trade editions. The library editions are well priced and come with an after-sales maintenance service.

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Genres

For a long time audiobook publishers focused on best-selling novels and classics. Today, the range of material is phenomenal and there is something for everyone.

General fiction

Fantasy to children's...from the classics through to contemporary fiction.

Non-fiction

History - following on from the success of BBCs History channel on television, audiobook publishers (of library editions) are publishing many titles in this genre.

There has even been a new departure with the development of the BBCs *Eyewitness* series - *A history of the twentieth century in sound*. This series has been sourced from the BBCs extensive radio archives and through the skill of the well-known historian Professor Joanna Bourke, brings history alive.

- Travel/autobiographies and biographies
- Humour: classic humour as well as contemporary humour
- Poetry
- Business titles
- Self-help titles
- Religious material (the list continues to expand).

A good audiobook section in the library needs to be promoted in the community so that those who do (and those that do not) visit the library know that the facility is available. The reward is the pleasure the stories bring to so many different people in so many different situations and the fact that they want to share that pleasure with each other and you, the librarian.