
Reviewed by: Mary Jane Miller, Department of Fine Arts, Brock University.

This bibliography is the result of a remarkable salvage operation by Howard Fink and Concordia University. As Professor Fink explains in his introduction, ten years ago the scripts and recordings which formed a world-class heritage of radio drama were scattered, strayed, sometimes stolen, often wiped and almost completely forgotten. Professor Fink had the vision and determination to tackle of retrieving the texts and supporting documentation, (with the help of SHRCC, Concordia University and colleagues) finding them a home, setting up an interdisciplinary Centre of Broadcasting Studies to take full scholarly advantage of these resources and then undertaking the absolutely necessary task of cataloguing them so that they would be useable for researchers of all kinds. The Bibliography is that step and is available in microfiche and on line at Concordia. The next, eagerly awaited step will be the publication of selected scripts and detailed analyses by several scholars using a variety of critical tools and methods.

The short monograph accompanying the microfiche version reprises the history of the CBC-CRBC-CNR radio drama, a history more fully outlined Fink's article on North American Radio drama in Radio Drama [Peter Lewis (Editor). London: Longman, 1981]. The monograph also presents a quite clearly written explanation of how to use the bibliography itself.

The condensed history of radio drama makes a water-tight case for the importance of radio drama in Canada as a patron of music and drama, a national voice, and a place where, by listening, millions of Canadians could get together to enjoy Jake and the Kid or the famous Stage anthology. Professor Fink is in more contentious territory when he discusses the turning point in our cultural history when radio drama yielded its mass audiences to television -- a date which corresponds roughly to 1961, the point where the bibliography ends.

To cite one example, I would dispute his assertions that CBC Television drama was so heavily influenced by American television that it abandoned anthology. Television anthology flourished until the mid-70s and has never vanished completely. Moreover, most good Canadian series are strongly inflected toward anthology. Continuing the proud tradition of CBC radio, CBC television drama developed for the most
part its own distinctive voice. Even the copshows do not exploit the crime and violence which ebbs and flows on American television as Professor Fink alleges. Perhaps the understandable resentment of those who chose to stay with radio and its diminishing audiences has unconsciously touched this account of the relationship of the two forms -- both of which have had to serve as our "national theatre." Would that someone would do for the television scripts and other materials what Dr. Fink has done for the radio scripts.

Regional radio drama is still waiting for a more than cursory glance -- perhaps a project for a graduate student at the Centre for Broadcasting Studies or for the provincial archivists who hold regional material. For example, the collection does not contain scripts from the five farm families (the Craigs in Ontario) whose lives mingled soap opera and good farming methods in the noon farm broadcasts. They may well have disappeared before Professor Fink's rescue operation or they may be collected in provincial archives.

For the critic who wishes to analyze the aesthetics of specific radio dramas, one of the most useful features of this bibliography is the inclusion of information about whether or not a recording of a play exists and where the recording is located -- usually at the Public Archives whose cooperation has been crucial to the project. It is also very helpful to be able to locate the main entry through the alphabetical list of titles and through a chronological list of titles.

Individual plays form one major set, serials and series (together with producers) another and original authors a third. The main entry contains information about the script, author, original author if the script is an adaptation, title and number of pages. Broadcast information includes broadcast date, place, duration, network, producer, and series title [but not composer or leading players]. The descriptive information includes classification by sub-genre (eight are used) and a "short, precise description of the major themes, characters, and plots."

It is very difficult to achieve a uniform standard in that aspect of the work, to present plot, theme and character information in a condensed and coherent form, particularly when diverse people are at work. Thus evaluative words are very rarely allowed to creep in. The entry for Tombola is atypical: "sets the scene for a cliched treatment of the romantic problems of the characters." I don't know the play but given the probable experience of the researcher and the template laid down for analysis, I am prepared to believe the play is cliched. If it really matters, I will look/listen for myself. Meanwhile, the adjective is informative. On the same principle, however, perhaps there should be a word or two of praise for Joseph Schull's superb play, The Jinker or at least a phrase to indicate the importance of Len Peterson's formal innovations in Burlap Bags to the development of radio drama in the late forties.
The monograph concludes with some very useful hints to readers regarding the hazards of research in a performing art. In the section on "Forms of Holdings: Paper, Microfilm, Sound," typical scripts are described and the crucial point made that the cleanest copy is rarely the most useful version or even the version actually broadcast. Thanks to this section the researcher should not make the mistake of thinking that a "rebroadcast" is necessarily a tape or wire recording to the original since, in the early years, it is very likely to be a completely new production. Such caveats are badly needed by the inexperienced researcher. Whole theories have foundered on not knowing a few basics about the process of production.

This Bibliography is very reliable, with few oversights and it is impeccably organized. All you need to know before going to the material itself is there. It is an indispensable tool for researchers in Communication Studies, Canadian Theatre History, Canadian Studies, Politics, Sociology, Psychology, Canadian History, and Popular Culture.