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Dramatic Publishing



FRANKENSTEIN

The Radio Play
By
PHILIP GRECIAN

Based on his own stage play
and on the novel by Mary Wollstencraft Shelley

Manuscript Version



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Frankenstein - The Radio Play, was first produced at the Dale Easton Barn Theatre at Lake Perry, Kansas, on October 6, 2001, under the direction of Karen Hastings with the following cast:

CAPTAIN ROBERT WALTON Frederic Bahr
VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN..... David Tangeman
HENRY CLERVAL..... John Hanna
PROFESSOR WALDMAN Frederic Bahr
CATHERINE FRANKENSTEIN Karla Hebert
BARONESS FRANKENSTEIN Karen Hastings
JUSTINE MORITZ Sally Jenkins
ELIZABETH FRANKENSTEIN..... Kirsten Hanna
THE CREATURE..... Steffen Wong

PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

HEAD FOLEY (SOUND) Ute Mueller
FOLEY ASSISTANCE Fred Salazar
MUSIC / KEYBOARD..... Joseph Kampsen

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In the first year of the 21st century I was mentoring a local theatre company that had, for two seasons, presented productions of my radio script, *Dracula!* with the advertized intention of making it an annual tradition. When another group in the area surprised us by announcing their own production of a full-stage version, we were somewhat nonplussed.

Dracula! had been based on an earlier full-stage script of mine, and I had a full-stage version of *Frankenstein* in the files as well. I pulled it out and adapted the story to staged radio drama. The group produced it in 2001 and alternated it with *Dracula!* in 2002 and 2003. In 2004 the other group then announced a full-stage version of *Frankenstein*, and, with some asperity, we retired both shows, at least temporarily, and I adapted two more titles—titles that were less apt to turn up elsewhere.

Over the years, the group discovered that staged radio drama was economical, novel, and pulled in audiences.

We discovered a few other things, too. Here are some of them:

1. Everything depends on sound. Never cast an actor because of his or her physical presence. Cast the actor because of what s/he can do vocally. Many of the actors from the golden age of radio looked not at all the way they sounded. If it helps, have auditions with the talent miked onstage behind the act curtain. Listen without looking.
2. Don't worry about costuming your actors to look like the characters they play. That's not the point. If you must have costuming, concentrate on the fashions of the 1940s, when radio was in its golden age.
3. Remind your actors that the voice must carry it all. A scowl or a posture is fine for the audience in attendance, and it may be necessary for your actors to establish character, but in the final evaluation, everything is in the voice.
4. Try to cast actors who can do multiple voices and accents. On-site audiences are fascinated to watch a single actor play multiple characters.
5. Music is terrifically important. It sets mood, moves your story from one location to another, one time to another, and it gives your audience clues regarding how they are supposed to relate to a scene. Do not try to produce

radio drama without a piano or organ, and a musician who understands the radio art form.

6. The real visual drama for the on-site audience is in watching the sound effects crew. Make sure they, and their various apparatuses, are clearly seen.

7. Try never to use pre-recorded sound. It robs the audience of the experience of seeing how a sound is produced.

8. A pause that may be effective in a play with costumes, lights, sound and makeup will seem an eternity in a radio drama. Shorten pauses or eliminate them entirely. Always keep energy high. Always.

9. In the commercial breaks written into the script, consider actually selling commercial time to local merchants and dramatizing commercials written specifically for your production. It helps with the production budget, and audiences love it.

There is a phenomenon we have noticed that has carried through all the radio productions: Many audience members will sit with their eyes closed, creating the radio experience for themselves. When we first noticed it, we thought they were falling asleep! Then we would see them suddenly look up toward the sound effects crew to see how a particular sound was created. Once they were satisfied, their heads would drop and their eyes would close again. They were experiencing theatre of the mind, literally.

If you have never staged radio drama before, you are about to make a startling and rewarding discovery, and so is your audience. The Golden Age of radio drama may have ended decades ago, but, with your participation, the Silver Age is just beginning.

— Philip Grecian

FRANKENSTEIN

A Radio Play in Two Acts
For 6 men and 4 women

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN ROBERT WALTON . . . captain of a ship seeking the Northwest Passage

Also plays: DeLACEY, a blind hermit
a PRISON GUARD
a PRIEST

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN creator of a monster

HENRY CLERVAL Victor's best friend

Also plays: a CREWMAN on Walton's ship
MAN 2 at DeLacey's cabin

PROFESSOR WALDMAN . . . a professor of medicine. Victor and Henry's mentor

Also plays: a CREWMAN on Walton's ship
MAN 1 at DeLacey's cabin

CATHERINE FRANKENSTEIN Victor's young sister

Also plays: BIRGITTA, a servant

BARONESS FRANKENSTEIN Victor and Catherine's mother

JUSTINE MORITZ governess to Catherine

ELIZABETH FRANKENSTEIN Victor's fiancée

THE CREATURE Victor's creation

Also plays: a CREWMAN on Walton's ship

ANNOUNCER 1940s-style radio announcer

Also plays: a CREWMAN on Walton's ship

PLACE: The Arctic Ocean near the Pole; Ingelstadt, Germany;
Geneva, Switzerland.

TIME: Toward the end of the 18th century.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *A radio studio. Doors R and L. A control booth window at an angle from UC to ULC, with an "On Air" light above. A platform DL where the keyboard player sits. DR is an array of sound-effects machines and tables with sound equipment. There is a couch and a coffee table UC, a counter area UR with water pitchers and cups. Chairs and incidental tables scattered. Three microphones downstage.*

AT RISE: *Sound-effects crew enters and crosses to equipment. Keyboard player enters. Actors enter one at a time and in groups. Some carry scripts.*

P.A. VOICE. Thirty seconds to air!

ALL (*ad-lib*). Thank you! (*The ACTORS, ad-libbing, prepare. Some leaf through their scripts. Some pick up scripts from chairs and tables. Others sit or move to microphones.*)

P.A. VOICE. In ten...

(The pace quickens as those ACTORS on microphones find places in their scripts and listen for the P.A. or watch the "On Air" light on the set.)

P.A. VOICE. 5...4...3...2...1...

("On Air" light comes on.)

SINGERS (*sing call letters in four-part harmony*). "W- - -!"

MUSIC UNDER.

ANNOUNCER. Broadcasting from the (*call letters based on name of producing group*) Studios, and through the sponsorship of (*name of sponsors*), (*name of producing group*) presents an exclusive radio adaptation, by Philip Grecian, of Mary Wollstencraft Shelley's... *Frankenstein!* Our story in a moment, but first, a word from our sponsor.

MUSIC CHANGE.

(Radio-style commercials from local sponsors in here.)

MUSIC. Theme.

ANNOUNCER. And now...turn out your lights and move in close to the glow of your radio dial as (*call letters*) presents...*Frankenstein!*

MUSIC: Organ sting.

PROLOGUE. In the summer of 1816, five writers were vacationing at the Villa Diodoto in Switzerland: Lord Byron; Clair Clairmont; John Polidori, Byron's physician; Percy Bysshe Shelley and his 19-year-old mistress, Mary Wollstencraft, whom he would wed by year's end. It was an unseasonably wet summer; the group, often confined indoors, wrote ghost stories and read them aloud to pass the time. Mary's story had a dramatic effect—for Lord Byron, upon hearing it, ran from the room in fright. With the encouragement of Byron and Shelley, Mary expanded her story to novel length, publishing it two years later...and ever since that time, it has been a favorite all over the world.

MUSIC. Exciting theme. Establish and under.

ANNOUNCER. Come with us now...through the power of your imagination, travel back in history. Hear our story, the story of...*Frankenstein!*

SFX: Thunderclap.

MUSIC: Organ sting.

SFX: Wind (which should remain under all "on deck" dialogue). Creaking of wood (ship planks and timbers). Rumbling (ice floes)

passing). Metal against metal, metal against wood (rigging at ends of ropes pounding against masts). Flapping of canvas (sails). Water flowing (waves and flow between icebergs and sheets of ice).

CREWMAN (*distant*). Fog on the horizon, Captain!

WALTON. Steady as she goes!

CREWMAN. Aye aye!

WALTON (*narrative echo*). We set sail in June of that year, over the top of the world, seeking the Northwest Passage from Russia to the Pacific Ocean. The ice made progress slow, but by early August the Polar region was in sight. (*Cut echo.*)

SFX: Rumbling and scraping.

(Next five lines of dialogue come fast, no time between lines and cues, perhaps overlapped.)

CREWMAN. More ice floes, Captain!

WALTON. Keep moving!

CREWMAN. The fog, Captain! She's rollin' in!

WALTON. Steer for sea-room while you can!

CREWMAN. Aye aye, sir!

CREWMAN. Can't see, Captain!

CREWMAN. Ice, captain!

SFX: Thumping and scraping.

CREW (*general rhubarb*)

SFX: Squealing of ice against the sides of the ship. Heavy cracking sounds.

CREWMAN. Dead in the water, Captain. Ice got us wedged in.

MUSIC. Organ sting.

WALTON (*narrative echo*). We sat motionless for hours. And then, the fog lifted and we beheld in all directions, an endless plain of ice, white and silver against the dead gray sky. (*Cut echo.*)

CREWMAN (*far distant*). Captain!

WALTON. Aye!

CREWMAN. Off the port bow!

CREW (*rhubarb*: “What’s he doing out in this?” “Look at the size of him.” “Hope he knows where he’s going,” etc. Under)

SFX: Dogs barking, far distant—fade in. Establish. Fade out by end of WALTON’s speech.

WALTON (*narrative echo*). I ran to the rail and saw it...a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs...the driver, a man...gigantic in stature, visible but for a moment, and then embraced by the fog. (*Cut echo, out of narrative, back into story:*) Nothing to do with us. I’m going below to get a little sleep. Wake me when the ice breaks.

CREWMAN. Aye, Captain.

MUSIC. Bridge.

SFX: Pounding on door.

CREWMAN (*muffled*). Cap’n! Cap’n!

WALTON. Hm...? Just a moment...

SFX: Door opens.

WALTON. What is it?

CREWMAN. Ice broke, sir.

WALTON. Ah...good...

CREWMAN. And another dogsled, sir...drifted up against the ship on a chunk of ice.

WALTON. You're sure it's not the same one.

CREWMAN. Different one. Dogs'r all dead...

WALTON. Any men?

CREWMAN. One. Unconscious. We're bringin' him down.

SFX: Multiple feet on wooden steps. Rhubarb voices.

WALTON. In here. Put him on that bunk.

SFX: General scuffling—establish and under.

VICTOR (*groan*)

WALTON. Brandy! Bring brandy!

CREWMAN. Yes sir...

WALTON. ...And blankets!

SFX: Rhubarb and scuffling fade.

VICTOR (*weakly*). This is...a ship.

WALTON. The good ship Cocytus. [Pronounce: Kaw-SIT-us]

VICTOR. Bound...?

WALTON. North.

VICTOR. To the pole?

WALTON. And beyond.

VICTOR (*with a sigh of relief*). Good. Good.

WALTON. I'm Robert Walton, captain of the ship.

VICTOR. Frankenstein. Victor Frankenstein.

WALTON. German?

VICTOR. Swiss.

WALTON. Explorer?

VICTOR. I...seek one who fled from me.

SFX: Approaching steps.

CREWMAN. Blankets, sir. And brandy.

WALTON. On the table.

CREWMAN. Anything else, sir?

WALTON. Thank you, no.

CREWMAN. Very good, sir.

SFX: Retreating footsteps.

WALTON. The one you seek...he travels in the same fashion?

VICTOR. By sled. Yes.

WALTON. Then I fancy we have seen him.

VICTOR (*excited*). When! Where? (*Sudden coughing and wheezing. Catching breath.*)

WALTON. Here. Drink.

VICTOR (*his cough is stifled as he drinks*). Mmm...aah... Thank you. Now tell me, quickly.

WALTON. Yesterday. We saw a sledge with a man in it...a giant of a man...

VICTOR (*excited*). Yes, yes! Traveling north...?

WALTON. Aye.

VICTOR. Good. Good. (*Pause.*) I have, doubtless, excited your curiosity...

WALTON. A man's life is his own.

VICTOR. Were it that simple.

WALTON. You have a family, then?

VICTOR. Once. No longer.

WALTON. Then you are responsible to no one but yourself.

VICTOR (*small ironic laugh*). You think so, eh? (*A pause, a sigh.*) I will tell you my tale, then...and pray you find a moral in it.

WALTON. Not if it pains you.

VICTOR. I am beyond pain.

WALTON. Oh, but...

VICTOR. Listen.

MUSIC fades in under.

VICTOR (*narrative echo*). In my boyhood I had an eager desire to learn. I rejected empty nursery rhymes for the ancient writings of the alchemists and was filled with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature. When the time came, I enrolled at the university in Ingolstadt and was fortunate in attracting the attention of Professor Waldman, who chaired the department of surgery and ultimately became my mentor. I graduated at the top of my class...my head filled with ideas, my heart filled with...little. In the evening, after our graduation ceremonies, I invited Professor Waldman, and my dear friend, Henry Clerval, to dinner at my chateau. (*Cut echo.*)

MUSIC trails off.

(*Under last sentence, fading in, we hear a few words of ad-libbed barely audible conversation, HENRY CLERVAL's laughter, fading in.*)

CLERVAL. An excellent meal, Victor! Never thought of you as a chef. A surgeon, yes! A chemist, absolutely, but a chef!

VICTOR. There is, Henry, a fine line between the brilliant chemist and the brilliant chef.

CLERVAL (*with a laugh*). And you've crossed the line!

VICTOR. And I've crossed the line! Professor Waldman, you enjoyed the meal?

WALDMAN. A fine dinner, Victor, but this chateau! You are alone here?

CLERVAL. Not for long. Victor and Elizabeth will be married soon.

WALDMAN. You will live here?

VICTOR (*uncomfortable*). No. Geneva...

WALDMAN. Then...?

VICTOR. I require room here for my...work...

WALDMAN. And no servants...

VICTOR. They would...disturb me.

CLERVAL (*with humor*). Just what is your work, Victor?

VICTOR (*subtly evasive*). Speculative, mostly...the nature of disease...the brain...the body.

WALDMAN. Ah! To eliminate all disease, cure the lame and the halt and create a perfect world!

VICTOR. Yes, exactly.

WALDMAN. Such are the goals of *all* of my students as they pass from the university.

(*CLERVAL laughs.*)

VICTOR. And if we were to move beyond those goals...

WALDMAN. Beyond?

VICTOR. We correct God's mistakes with science every day...so then, why stop there? Could we not improve upon the original plan? Achieve perfection? Flawless creatures? A new Adam! A perfect Eve? What then, Professor?

WALDMAN. Why then, my boy, we would be gods...

VICTOR. Gods!

WALDMAN. And bear the responsibilities of gods.

VICTOR. Yes. I suppose that's so. (*To himself, under his breath.*) Gods!

WALDMAN. This would be an interesting discussion for a rainy afternoon, Victor... Of course, if such a thing were possible it could only end in tragedy.

VICTOR. Of course.

WALDMAN. And your plans, Henry?

CLERVAL. Find modest rooms in town, fix my shingle over the door and establish a practice.

WALDMAN. I wish you much success.

VICTOR. Would anyone care for sherry?

WALDMAN. Ah! Thank you, no; it grows late, I must be going.

VICTOR. It was good of you to come this evening.

WALDMAN. Your company is always a pleasure, Victor.

CLERVAL. I'd best go as well...

VICTOR. Stay a bit, will you, Henry. There's something I wish to discuss with you.

CLERVAL. Ah. Well...certainly. I'll have some of that sherry after all, then.

VICTOR. Professor, I'll see you to the door.

WALDMAN. That won't be necessary. I can find my way. Good night, Victor...

VICTOR. Professor.

CLERVAL. Professor.

SFX: Footsteps retreat. Door opens in background. Closes.