

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 19: Audiobooks are for Listeners

(Brief intro music)

Leah: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Leah.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Leah: Last month we discussed OCPL's new board game collection. Be sure to tune into episode 18 for more information on how to check out any number of games, or feel free to ask a member of staff. This episode, though, we have yet another collection to introduce, and there's a small clue in the title. The library has offered audiobooks in physical and digital format for a long time now, but today Rachel and I are excited to tell you about our new playaways.

Rachel: Yes, this is very exciting, because playaways are a great way for young children to enjoy listening to books if they haven't yet learned the ins and outs of a CD or MP3 player. For those of you who have never heard of these things before, let me give you a brief rundown. Playaways are battery operated audio players that come with prerecorded stories, almost all of which are available in high definition. So, like an audiobook, but you don't need a device of your own—or an Internet connection—to make them work. They are pretty small and weigh next to nothing. This makes them portable and easy to hold with little hands. Which...that's a pretty cute visual, don't you think?

Leah: I do.

Rachel: (laughs) The controls are basic: press buttons to power on, play or pause, fast forward and rewind, skip ahead or go back to the start of a chapter, and to adjust the volume. They are designed for individual listening, meaning that they don't have built-in speakers. So, you'd need a pair of headphones or earbuds to hear anything. Alternatively, however, you can use the playaway's universal audio jack to hook it up to an auxiliary cord, attach that to your car stereo, and listen with your whole family while on a road trip. Or wherever. That's the tagline: plug and play. Right now, OCPL offers playaways as part of its children's collection, but other libraries in the system do offer titles geared toward older patrons. They're especially popular for kids because they provide access to their favorite stories without the frustration of more complicated technology. I like them because you don't have to mess around with downloading audio files, which can take up a fair amount of space on a mobile device. I happen to have a disc drive at home, so I can listen to CD audiobooks, but I do find them a bit bulky. So, playaways make for a nice, easy alternative.

Leah: Agreed! So, the way that I use audiobooks is maybe a little different than how other people use them. Basically, I only buy the audiobook if I've read and adore the story already. I've only made a few exceptions to that rule, and I haven't gotten all the way through all...all of those exceptions, except one. I guess the way I use audiobooks is for almost for, like, background noise? But that's not quite right either, because I like to listen to them while I'm doing a task that occupies my hands. Washing dishes? Audiobook. Driving a long distance? Audiobook. Working out? Audiobook. Yard work? Audiobook. I could go on, but I think you get the point. I especially like audiobooks in the car; they really help to pass

the time for me. When I moved to Florida in 2011, I had a bunch of podcast episodes cued up on my iPod. Which I did, in fact, use a contraption plugged into it to find an empty radio station to play the iPod over my stereos. Who remembers that technology?

Rachel: I do! (laughs)

Leah: Anyways, the podcasts helped pass the two 12-hour driving day, but I was constantly selecting a new episode or finding a different radio station. It was frustrating. Fast forward five years when I was moving back to Wisconsin, and by then I had discovered audiobooks. So, I cued up two audiobooks in the same series that I adored and happily listened—via the same technology setup and pitfalls—all the way back to Wisconsin. And fun fact: When I'm in the car with my cat and play music, she meows like crazy. When I play an audiobook, she's lulled right to sleepy enjoyment with minimal meowing. What can I say? Even my cat likes audiobooks!

Rachel: Adorable.

Leah: One thing that does bother me is when a narrator who's voicing a series changes. Totally interrupts the continuity for me! There's one case of this in my library that I keep despite that because I like the stories. I'm referring to Linda Howard's "To Die For" and "Drop Dead Gorgeous." These books both revolve around the same main character—a woman from North Carolina. The narrator used in the first book has sort of a fake southern accent, and I think a lot of people didn't think her voice matched the character. So, for the second book, the narrator was changed, and to me, though her accent is more authentic sounding, she sounds more mature. So, it's this whole cognitive shift that happens if I listen to the books back-to-back, which happens pretty often. Contrary to a lot of reviewers, I liked the first narrator and thought her voice matched the character better. But I suppose that's the beauty of art and personal interpretation, right? Anyways, to promote this new collection, we're going to give you some audiobook recommendations. Because yes, listening to books does count as reading. Did you know that, according to various sources, 85% of what we learn we learn by listening? That's pretty incredible. So, listen up as we tell you about some of our favorites.

Rachel: I normally use the library's digital media database Hoopla to listen to audiobooks for free, but before I started working here or even knew what Hoopla was, my husband-then-boyfriend and I occasionally subscribed to Audible, a platform created by Amazon. Now and again they offer some pretty decent promotions where users can listen for free for a certain period of time. In fact, the last audiobook I listened to was one I found in my backlogged Audible library. It's "The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul" written by Douglas Adams, the famed author of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." He has a great sense of humor so, if you're into satire, definitely give his writing a go. "The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul" is book two in Adams's "Dirk Gently" series. Originally released in the late '90s, the story follows 'holistic' detective Dirk Gently as he tries to solve a series of intertwined whodunits. Adams did have a third title planned—"The Salmon of Doubt"—but, very sadly, he passed away before it was finished. I really like "Dirk Gently" as a whole. The character is off the wall but still relatable and, again, the stories are funny. In the sequel, Dirk investigates a locked room mystery. We find him running late for a meeting with his latest client—some poor bloke who was raving about monsters and blood contacts. And potatoes. Dirk doesn't take him too seriously, is more interested in getting paid so that he can finally earn enough to replace his disgusting refrigerator. When he shows up for the meeting, hours late at this point, he finds his client's house crawling with police, because it turns out that said client was killed very horribly, with no way for the culprit to have gotten out through a barricaded door. Dirk feels

guilty, of course, and makes up his mind to solve the case. Meanwhile, an American named Kate who is currently living in London wages a one-woman campaign to get pizza delivered to her flat. The thing about the U.K., at least when this book was written, is that they don't do pizza delivery. There aren't any delivery people running around town to bring a fresh slice to your door. Which...sounds hellish to me, so I understand Kate's plight. Anyway, she eventually meets the actual God of Thunder, Thor, and helps him through some tough times. Does she also get delivery? Find out for yourself! That's the premise, and I won't say any more because A) it's a mystery and B) you sort of definitely have to listen for yourself to understand the author's jokes. This audiobook is just over six hours in length, but honestly it goes by really fast. I enjoyed the Audible version because it's narrated by the author, but there is a full-cast version available on OverDrive which can be listened to on any smart device using the free Libby app. Never fear: I'll provide links to all of the library's databases that we're talking about in the podcast show notes. I also quickly want to mention that there are two televised adaptations of "Dirk Gently," and both are quite...uh, interesting. The first is only loosely based on the books, but it stars Stephen Mangan who I think makes an epitomal Dirk. The other, most recent adaptation was produced through BBC America and is somehow much, much more bonkers, as if that were possible. So, take your pick!

Leah: I wanted to tell you guys about the book series I just got finished listening to—reading? It was the "Arcane Society" series written by Jayne Ann Krentz, her maiden name of Jayne Castle, and a pseudonym of Amanda Quick. Those names all correlate to different genres of writing: contemporary, historical, and futuristic respectively. Back in about 2007—which yes, I did have to look that up, and I can't believe it's been so long—she started writing this series that spanned all of her writing. Bear with me while I try to explain. It's a little bit complicated. Basically, she'd already done the necessary world building for her historical and especially her futuristic novels. When she started writing the Arcane society, she introduced it in her historical Victorian world, a place where secret societies flourished IRL. Then she was able to introduce that secret Arcane Society in her contemporary novels, referencing ancestors from the Vi...Victorian past we were already familiar with. The first eight books in the series continue that way, sort of back and forth between contemporary times and the Victorian era. But book nine jumps us forward to her futuristic world which is set on an entirely different world with different rules of nature. The same ol' Arcane Society though, and people with the same ancestors. Honestly though, five of the books in the series are Victorian, five are contemporary, and two are futuristic. So, if you like novels that have a slight paranormal bend in that some characters have special abilities but fit into the natural world, you might like the series. Jayne Castle books—the futuristic ones—are bit more of a stretch because they feature nothing of our contemporary world except casual references to the other planet. And we do hold a few of these series in our CD Audiobook collection, if anyone is interested in checking it out. I would recommend reading—or listening, whatever floats your boat—in order for maximum enjoyment.

Rachel: The audiobook I'm currently in the process of reading is a bit of a doozy. Not because I dislike it, but because it's fairly long and a wild ride. I'm talking about "Dune" by Frank Herbert. It is narrated by a full voice cast and split into three parts on Audible, averaging around seven hours each. So, a fairly long book. This is somewhat timely, because a new "Dune" movie is expected to release this December. The trailer looks boss, which is one of the reasons I'm reading it in my free time. The book's always better, right? Or so they say. "Dune" is the kind of sprawling epic that reminds me of Stephen King's "Dark Tower" series, told over many books—eight, in this case—and one of the most beloved sci-fi novels of all time. Truly. It has won too many literary awards to name. At its core, "Dune" is about a planet called

Arrakis over which different noble houses are vying for control. Even though the planet is a desert inhospitable to most, it is also a rare source of a coveted drug named Melange, or 'the spice' as it's called on the streets. This drug allows people to live longer and gives them what I'm going to call 'psychic' abilities. The spice is also necessary for space travel, because it gives the user a necessary dose of multidimensional awareness. A young prophet named Paul is sent to Arrakis with his household, and it all kind of gets out of hand for them. I won't spoil anything, but I will say that there are giant sandworms. I never watched the first "Dune" movie directed by David Lynch so, whenever the sandworms are mentioned in the book, I always picture them as the creatures from 1990 cult classic "Tremors," starring a footloose and fancy-free Kevin Bacon.

Leah: (laughs)

Rachel: Man, that movie's fun! Anywho, the novel "Dune" is well written, and if you are a fan of deep space lore, then you will love the world that Herbert has created. There is a lot going on—a lot to keep track of—but it helped me to distinguish between different characters—almost all of whom have crazy names—since they are voiced by different actors. This same version is also available on OverDrive, so if that type of narration helps you keep the story straight, too, then I say give it a listen.

Leah: Another series I particularly like listening to is one I wanted to talk about in one of my mini-episodes, but I guess I couldn't quite find the right episode or maybe the words to explain that complex world that the author built. I'll do my best now, though! So, I'm referring to the world of "The Others" written by Anne Bishop. This is a totally different world to ours, though sort of still set on earth. Names for things are different, societies are different, and supernatural entities called simply 'the Others' pretty much control everything. There are tons of different types of Others, from animals that can shift into humans to spirits that embody and inhabit each Great Lake, and v...vampires—though in the book they're called Sanguinati. There are so many more, too. It's just scratching the surface. There are also regular humans, who do their best to flourish amongst Others who would just as soon eat them as help them. It's a complex world, and frankly I can only follow the audiobooks because I first read the books. For me, reading something in print helps me visualize a world in a way that hearing about something doesn't. And that's on being a pretty tactile-visual learner, I guess. Anyways, the majority of the book follow our main character, Meg, who has been horribly mistreated in her life. She's a special kind of human who can see the future or past when her skin is cut. The main struggle in the book is that her escape from captivity where girls are cut to speak prophecy for the highest bidder. She's able to escape, but having spent her whole life in captivity she's not sure where to turn. She happens across a community of Others and is able to live amongst them. But there are tons of struggles and mishaps along the way—enough to fill five books. There are also a few spin-off novels written in the same world but with various main characters. This too, is a series you really want to read in order. All of the books have the same narrator, which is great for continuity. I personally liked her, although I think I might be less particular about it than others. As long as someone is reading the book and can help me distinguish characters, that's pretty much all I'm looking for. I'd also like to share one pro-tip that I always use myself: I listen to my audiobooks just a bit faster than normal. Usually I play them 25% faster, sometimes 50. Helps to get through the unabridged audiobooks I prefer, which can run about 10 to 15 hours, just a little faster.

Rachel: That is a really good trick, and one that I have employed on occasion. (laughs) Finally, I wanted to talk an audiobook that I haven't read yet but still kind of want to recommend. Uh, I guess we'll see

how it goes! Next up in my queue is the novel “Night Film,” a mystery thriller written by Marisha Pessl and narrated by Jake Weber. It was published in 2013 and is about 23 hours long. From what I can gather, there is an interactive element through an app called “Night Film Decoder.” That sounds fun to me, but you never know how well it will actually work until you try it. Anyway, I’ll read ya’ll the plot provided by the publisher: “On a damp October night, beautiful young Ashley Cordova is found dead in an abandoned warehouse in lower Manhattan. Though her death is ruled a suicide, veteran investigative journalist Scott McGrath suspects otherwise. As he probes the strange circumstances surrounding Ashley’s life and death, McGrath comes face-to-face with the legacy of her father: the legendary, reclusive cult-horror-film director Stanislas Cordova—a man who hasn’t been seen in public for more than thirty years. For McGrath, another death connected to this seemingly cursed family dynasty seems more than just a coincidence. Though much has been written about Cordova’s dark and unsettling films, very little is known about the man himself. Driven by revenge, curiosity, and a need for the truth, McGrath, with the aid of two strangers, is drawn deeper and deeper into Cordova’s eerie, hypnotic world.” I’m hella intrigued. The audiobook edition that I got for free via an Audible promotion is also currently available as an OverDrive title, with the physical disc set available through OCPL and a few other libraries. This means that you guys can check out “Night Film” at your leisure. We’ll wrap things up there. Check the show notes for info on what Leah and I talked about this episode. Want to check out a bunch of audiobooks or some of OCPL’s new playaways for kids? Browse both collections on the CountyCat catalog or in-person at the library. If print copies are more your jam, the Milwaukee County Library System most def has what you want. I will remind you all to subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. Reach us through Oak Creek Public Library’s website or Facebook page. Just use the #notyourmotherslibrary Until next time, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)