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The Society of Authors is the largest UK trade union for all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators, at every stage of their careers. With over 12,400 members and growing, we've been advising individuals and speaking out for the profession since 1884.

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from the editor

what does the SoA do?

A year ago, we published a special issue of *The Author* on writing and publishing in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. I was conscious at the time of a conspicuous Northern-Ireland-shaped gap in our coverage – an absence of attention that too often characterises the attitude of British-based institutions.

Not the SoA, however. For much of this last year, authors in Northern Ireland have been served by Dr Hilary McCollum, novelist, non-fiction author and the first dedicated SoA member of staff for the region. She reveals the extent of the obstacles and disadvantages faced by writers in the region, and how the SoA is trying to ameliorate the situation. Alongside her report is a thoughtful analysis of the Northern Irish literary scene – is there one? does it face south or east? – by Martin Doyle, the literary editor of the *Irish Times*, who was born in Co. Down and has recently written about the profound impact of the Troubles.

I wanted to spotlight the SoA's activities in the region partly because the work of the SoA is an underlying motif in this Winter issue. I was mildly dismayed recently when I read a side-swipe at the SoA on social media, attacking it for not hitching its colours to the mast of a particular political issue. 'What is the Society doing?' the critic – a voluble author – asked.

I felt a bit like Professor Calculus in *Destination Moon*, when Captain Haddock accuses him of 'acting the goat'. Calculus, in high dudgeon, takes Haddock on a tour, over several pages, of the actual full-scale moon-rocket base he has built, complete with finished rocket. This issue can't offer a full tour of the SoA's activities, but it does showcase at least some of its indefatigable and, I think, invaluable work. Supporting scriptwriters and BBC audio dramatists, for instance. (Theo Jones from the SoA staff team explains more, alongside a superb piece by audio dramatist Tina Pepler, celebrating the 100th anniversary of BBC audio drama.) Helping members chase payments they are owed by publishers. (We offer advice here on how you can do it yourself.)

Most recently, the SoA has been highly engaged with publishers over the extraordinary deal they announced that they had cut with Spotify at the beginning of October, which will allow Spotify Premium subscribers access to 15 free hours of audiobooks per month. The deal was done without any transparency or consultation with authors, and has given rise to serious concerns. These are outlined in this Winter issue: from the SoA side, by our chief executive, Nicola Solomon; and from the technical side by former Spotify chief economist and author, Will Page.

The one positive that emerged from Spotifygate, if I can call it that, was the way that authors and agents came together to speak out against the way publishers had behaved. I tend not to invite literary agents to write – authors come first! – but for this issue I have invited two to contribute. Rachel Mills (of Rachel Mills Literary) writes trenchantly on the issue of delayed payments by publishers, which are shockingly common. Catherine Cho (of Paper Literary, though she is also an author) contributes our regular diary column.

We also feature an interview with Katherine Rundell, and the usual articles tackling professional life and wellbeing. Ann Morgan discusses the realities of blog tours. Jenny Alexander advises on promoting your work, even when it runs against your most painfully deep instincts. And we offer a practical piece on doing picture research, alongside a provocative broadside from the art historian Bendor Grosvenor, who takes aim at museums and galleries that, in his view, charge too much for permission to publish images of works in their collections. ●



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Photo © Dan McNally



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'I try to explain this uncertainty to my clients, how our industry is unknowable and unpredictable, and that the one thing that is under their control – the writing – is also what is the most important. Perhaps that is what gives our industry its magic.'

Catherine Cho (p.34)

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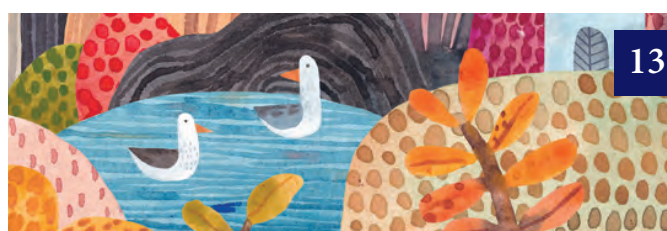
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Cover art by Tavis Coburn

Tavis's work has appeared in *Time Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, the *New Yorker*, and his clients include Nike, Apple and Arsenal Football Club. His style references classic illustration of the 1960s, with a nod to vintage sci-fi, and *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* covers. He lives in Toronto with his wife, two children, and their dog. www.behance.net/TavCo



Shackles off

As the BBC celebrates 100 years of audio drama, Tina Pepler looks back at the origins of the form

I felt exactly as I felt on that cold bright morning when I had been told to take the aeroplane into the air alone for the first time. Exactly.’

The pioneering BBC producer Lance Sieveking’s memory of his experience of using the sound mixing panel for the first time, in 1928, conjures the spirit of the time. Excitement, fear, the still-raw memory of the trauma of war, of the Spanish flu pandemic. The newness of the medium. The freedom of the air.

‘On the evening of September 4th 1928 – it was a Tuesday – I dressed in a white tie and tails, dined alone at the Blue Cockatoo in Cheyne Walk, then went to my office and found the script where I’d hidden it; there were notes from colleagues, a call from a friend.’

The script was Sieveking’s ground-breaking play, *Kaleidoscope*, and it was first broadcast that night. The response in the *Evening News* the next day was enthusiastic:

‘Listeners in all parts of the country today are discussing their strange experience last night when they lived through the emotions and fears and tragedies of another man’s life. This extraordinary transmigration was caused by one of the most extraordinary feats of broadcasting which has ever been carried out. This was *Kaleidoscope*: a rhythm representing the life of a man from cradle to grave, by Lance Sieveking.’

Val Gielgud, long-time head of production at the BBC in its

early days, saw the production as pivotal. As he wrote in his book *British Radio Drama*,

No longer was radio drama to be cabined within the bounds of theatre form and stage convention. The shackles had been struck off. If the wings could only be grown there was nothing to prevent soaring.

Yet for Sieveking, the whole experience spoke of impermanence. Of course, the play was going out live, and was not recorded, and Sieveking wrote of how strange it was to know that the whole world might be listening, and yet the magic, the characters, the story – the kaleidoscope – he was conjuring out of the air would simply vanish when the broadcast was over.

Living ‘supremely in the moment’

I started my writing career in radio and from the outset, loved the imaginative and creative freedom radio drama offers the writer – and indeed the listener. I began to work on a PhD on the origins of radio drama and soon realised that these freedoms were the magnet for the most creative of the pioneers at the BBC in the early days, and instead of writing a history of the form up until the 1960s – as planned – I stopped in 1929. Who wouldn’t be beguiled by the stories of those times, by the personalities – some were like rock-star celebrities – and by the resonance for our own times? Lance Sieveking joined the BBC when the First World War and the Spanish flu pandemic were still vivid memories. He was a decorated fighter pilot and prisoner of war before he was a radio pioneer, so he knew all about impermanence; he knew about living in the moment,

and knew what it means to lose something – someone – you care about.

My research seemed to show that his wartime experience of living on the edge and surviving when most pilots didn't see the end of the conflict intensified his willingness to experiment and take risks in his work. Sieveking was not the only fighter ace to have joined the BBC. The writer and founding BBC executive Cecil Lewis was there even before Sieveking; he too had been a pilot in the war, and he too was one of the risk-takers, and very conscious of the impact of the wartime experience on his approach to life and work afterwards. He wrote in his book *Sagittarius Rising* that for him and for his generation, the idea of a life with an easy-developing pattern 'was thrown completely out of symmetry by the First World War... we very young men had no place, actual or prospective, in a peaceful world. We walked off the playing fields into the lines. We lived supremely in the moment.'

Just as fascinating for me was to realise that whereas some of the people who worked at the BBC in those earliest days believed that security was a mirage and that all we have is the present moment, for others, security was the only thing they did believe in, and they lived their lives and their careers

“podcasting is now arguably the real driver of creativity on the airwaves

“They came, they dazzled, they moved on – leaving others to provide steadiness and continuity for the developing broadcaster

accordingly. Cecil Lewis and some of the other innovators of those times didn't stay all that long at the BBC. They came, they dazzled, they moved on – leaving others to provide steadiness and continuity for the developing broadcaster.

Finding the story

These were the thoughts that hijacked and haunted and ultimately steered my thinking as I wrote my thesis. More recently I was commissioned to write a play for Radio 4, as part of the BBC's centenary programming. I decided that I wanted to explore those pioneering days and the risk-taking sensibilities of those pilots in a way that could speak to the present day. I wanted to create a conversation between then and now – of people 100 years apart yet both living in the shadow of a pandemic and of global conflict, as new media forms are being born. The instability, impermanence and loss; the fear, and the concomitant need for courage and boldness; the willingness, literally and metaphorically, to fly. I wanted to reflect, provoke and maybe heal. Perhaps above all, I wanted

Ensuring the health of audio drama

The SoA's Theo Jones takes a brief look at SoA support for (and celebration of) writers of audio drama

In September 2023, the BBC celebrated 100 years of audio drama with a series of special commissions – including Tina Pepler's *Kaleidoscope 3*. The BBC's anniversary is well worth celebrating but at the same time, it is crucial to recognise the centrality of writers to this unique artform, and their vulnerability.

The SoA celebrates and support scriptwriters and audio dramatists in a number of ways. Best known, perhaps, are our annual audio drama prizes – the Tinniswood for best script and the Imison for debuts. They draw on a prize pot of £3,000 from our generous sponsors, the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society, and the Peggy Ramsay Foundation.

Much more work goes on behind the scenes. The Contracts and Advisory team offers dedicated one-to-one advice and guidance to scriptwriter members, vetting contracts and answering queries relating to royalty payments, credits and tax. We produce the Advisory Clinic podcast series, contribute to the SoA@Home festival, and run outreach events.

We also seek to ensure that the terms and conditions on which scriptwriters are commissioned are protected. Three or four times a year, we join the Writers' Guild of Great Britain and the Personal Managers' Association to negotiate a series of contracts and rate cards with the BBC, to cover audio drama and scripted contributions for broadcast on their public services, including radio and podcast.

Meeting as the Audio Forum, representatives from the

SoA negotiate contractual terms and minimum fees to ensure good practice throughout the commissioning process as well as fair and equitable remuneration for writers. We also negotiate with the BBC for the use of published material on its services with distinct agreements and rates in place to cover radio and television, as well as for the commission of radio features and talks.

The Audio Forum has other, indirect benefits: it allows the SoA and the other representative organisations to lobby the BBC on issues including commissioning opportunities, and to stay abreast of strategic changes such as the move of audio drama production teams to BBC Studios, the BBC's commercial arm.

Members will be aware that for a number of years we have been deeply concerned by cuts made to slots available for writers on the BBC's linear radio channels, from the removal of the 15-minute *Woman's Hour* slot to reductions to the Saturday Afternoon Drama and weekday Afternoon Drama slots. The BBC insists it remains committed to audio drama, and is still passionate about it, but without transparent commissioning opportunities and continued investment, it is difficult for writers to plan and sustain their work.

Scriptwriters and audio dramatists are a precious community of writers. We believe it is essential that their interests are safeguarded – to protect the livelihoods of writers who are at the heart of the audio drama eco-system and to ensure the health of the form for years to come.

For further information on any of these deals, or to have your interests represented to the BBC, please contact Theo Jones, who co-ordinates the Scriptwriters Group: tjones@societyofauthors.org

to find a kind of freedom. I had the impulse, but I had yet to find the story.

You start with what you know about the piece you haven't written yet. I did know from the outset that I wanted Sieveking and his *Kaleidoscope* to be a central part of the play. I couldn't make the second *Kaleidoscope*, because that had already happened, in 1929. I knew that I wanted the play to involve flying, and someone who's interested in sound technology, and other characters who could go on journeys. I also realised quite soon that I wanted there to be two parallel stories: radio is a brilliant medium for telling a story, and as long as you take care of the listener it can move like a camera, like sunlight, and easily accommodates two narratives at once, in different places, at different times. In my play, *Kaleidoscope 3*, one story is set in 1928, with the creation of the first *Kaleidoscope*, the other in the present day. This was no place for a backward-looking approach – the play had to be as much about now as a century ago. And I knew that, somehow, this should be a play about freedom. Just as Sieveking and Lewis had found a wonderful freedom in the sky, so did they embrace the freedoms of the medium of radio.

Radio, when nothing else could

Anyone who has worked with radio knows about that freedom – about the fluidity of the medium and the focus you need to bring to good listening. I found myself writing about characters who understood or, in the course of the narrative, discovered all of that. You know how sometimes, as you start to write, something that you hadn't planned just shows up? That kept happening with *Kaleidoscope 3*. That's how a betrayal and a bereavement emerged as drivers for Iris, one of the two main characters, and how a significant character died without my having planned to kill him off. I did know that the play had to involve flying both now and 100 years ago, so Iris was given flying lessons.

Since this commission was part of the BBC's centenary programming, I wanted to celebrate audio drama and all it can still offer. There are so many times – too many to mention – in my own writing career when I've used, or encountered, those freedoms. In *Kaleidoscope 3*, for instance, I include a storyline about a (real) radio station set up by Syrian refugees. Until a few years ago, Radio Alwan was based in Istanbul: radio because faces must not be seen; Istanbul because when they started the work in Syria the broadcasts made their families targets for Assad's regime. With almost no money, and at great danger to themselves and their frontline reporters, the station

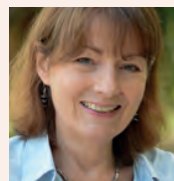
“ Insecurity can be so, so hard. But Cecil Lewis would say that it can also give you wings

found a way of broadcasting accurate news from Syria back into Syria, along with a shoestring soap opera broadcasting for 15 minutes every day, telling the story of a mother trying to get her son out of Syria. Radio let them do it, when nothing else could.

Now, Alwan has lost its funding, and has fallen silent. Yet it's still true to say that audio drama is having a new golden age. The pandemic is one driver: around the world, people in TV and theatre delighted in the alternative outlet radio offered them, and the lockdowns prompted a wave of innovation in remote-recording and production. In the UK this was supported not only by the BBC but by the emergence of podcasting – now arguably the real driver of creativity on the airwaves. I used to have to tell Creative Writing MA students that, broadly speaking, if they lived outside the UK – and therefore weren't eligible for BBC radio drama commissions, except on the World Service – they would struggle to make original audio drama. Now I can tell them to just do it. And they do.

The BBC has always been a champion of audio drama as a place to foster new talent, and its support for radio writers (and actors) can still be framed as an antidote to the chronic precarity that is part of freelance life. But then, the BBC itself is so much more exposed to uncertainty than it has been for a long time.

Cecil Lewis would recognise and welcome that atmosphere from his pioneering days. Insecurity can be so, so hard. But Lewis would say that it can also give you wings. As he put it himself, 'Security is useless.... If you live according to security you put chains and handcuffs round yourself before you start.' ●



Tina Pepler is a dramatist who has written extensively for BBC Radio 4, Radio 3 and the World Service. Her television work has been broadcast on BBC1, Channel 4 and ITV, and ranges from historical drama to contemporary single dramas. Her PhD thesis focused on the BBC in its first decade. *Kaleidoscope 3* is available on BBC Sounds.

