

Voicing an OPINION

Miriam Margolyes has enjoyed a successful career on stage and screen, but she has a great love for audio work. Here, she reveals her tips on how to make it in this sector

Photography Debra Hurford Brown

Q *When did your career begin in audio?*
I started in radio for the BBC in 1965 when I joined the BBC Drama Repertory Company. It was a company of around 40 actors at that point. It's considerably reduced now, but it still exists. It remains a very good job to have because it gives you a foundation in radio technique and how to use a microphone. I was able to work with a lot of wonderful actors such as Paul Scofield and Claire Bloom at a time when radio was very popular. It appears to be on its way back, but radio work has been in the shadows for many years.

Q *How healthy is the audio sector?*
The whole area of voice work has enormously increased since I started. It isn't just BBC radio drama, it's commercials, audiobooks; there's commentaries; there's feature animations, video games and lectures. I think people can make a living working just with their voice. But you have to be good and it isn't the case that every actor can do voice work. It is a particular skill. For example, you need to be able to time a piece of text so that if you are asked to do it in 30 seconds, you can do it. There are irritations, which I know Equity is looking at, such as pay rate agreements. I also find the issue of the engineer and director a problem. If the company is not providing a director then that should be reflected in the pay as it means the actor is taking on extra work.

Q *Do you think audio work should get more respect?*
I believe that recording an audiobook is the highest and most difficult test for any actor. I also think that my voice work is some of the best performances I've ever done. I'm extremely proud of Sue Townsend's *The Queen and I* audiobook, for which I won an award. I played all the members of the Royal Family and told the story. I also loved recording *Oliver Twist* in its entirety. Dickens' novels or any classic books are very testing. When you are working on an audiobook, you concentrate on talking to one person, to nourish their imagination. Audio work does require particular skills. For example, if you are creating a character in a feature

animation, you have nothing but your voice to work with. They give you a drawing and a piece of direction, but everything about the character has got to come from the voice.

Q *What advice would you give for someone wanting to work in the audio sector?*
You need to listen and observe. Listen to audiobooks, listen to commercials, do it critically and practise on your own. Record yourself. Hear whether you are sounding nasal, whether your 'S' sounds are not good enough, whether they are sibilant, for example. Explore the lower registers of your voice, watch your consonants and keep the energy going to the end of the sentence. If you are reading an audiobook, you have to be able to control your breathing so that it is not heard on the mic. In terms of finding work, I think you have to make a voice reel and go around the voice agents. You can also listen to commercials and find out if there's a particular director or a commercial that you enjoy and write to them. It's a really rewarding area to work in. 🍷

Get our guide to audio

● **A GUIDE TO AUDIO WORK** has been compiled by members of Equity's Audio Committee who are experienced audio artists. It covers subjects such as ADR (automated dialogue replacement), audiobooks, commercials, radio drama and video games. It aims to provide a background to the major areas of work in this sector and answer frequently asked questions such as 'Is it necessary to have a dedicated voice agent?' and 'Do I need a home studio?' Download the guide from: www.equity.org.uk/AudioGuide

