

See me, Hear me

A case study in audiobooks by **Veronica Paulina**

I am in a sound booth listening through headphones to instructions from a recording engineer. I pay close attention and speak into the microphone.

"Testing, testing," I say.

"OK, you can start now," he says.
"Don't rush, take it slowly".

Am I a singer recording a new song? A musician or a rock star, perhaps? Or am I an actor or radio host? Am I recording a jingle or a commercial? No, I am not a singer or a star. I don't know how to play music or perform. I don't make my living on the airwaves.

I am the self-published author of an audio book. I have taken a day off from my full-time job to drive up to the studio of a recording engineer. Through luck, I have found a professional who has agreed to produce my work for a fraction of his regular fee. I am here for my voice test and first recording session.

Thirty minutes into the session I'm told my voice doesn't work. The lead character in my book is a man – a strong, angry man – and I can't

carry his point of view or convey his passion. The engineer recommends we hire a male actor to play the lead and a female actor to play the omniscient narrator, the only other voice in the story. He says he'll find the talent and negotiate a fee.

Professional actors are just one more expense on my journey to self-publish a 10,000 word story. Written in 88 sonnets and worked on for three years as dawn was breaking over New Jersey, I had made the executive decision (as a self-publisher what other kind is there?) to publish my book not in print, but on audio. Wrestling with this difficult – and ultimately

expensive – decision was not easy, but as my story is written in poetry and knowing that poetry's audience is small, I believed that putting the work on audio and adding music and sound effects would broaden its market.

Whether or not I made the right decision remains to be seen. Since its release in 2007 I have sold little more than 20 copies. Such meager sales don't even begin to put a dent in the expense of audio publishing: a recording engineer, two actors, a graphic artist for cover design and typesetting of the text (included in the audio package), ISBN, barcode, 500 copies of two CDs, 500 CD cases,



colour cover, print copies of text, incorporation fees, and more. And this was before any investment in promotion and publicity.

As soon as my book was available, I put it up on Amazon. I paid for the design and hosting of a website. I sent press releases to newspapers and entered a number of fee-based competitions. After mailing review copies to newspapers and magazines, I was contacted by a reporter on a local paper who interviewed me and ran a front page article along with a photo in a suburban newspaper – the great coup of my media campaign.

I gave copies to family and friends in return for a friendly review. Not all of them were friendly. I suspect this is a common trap for the self-published author in that we expect people we know to be enthusiastic about our book even though they may not be serious readers or have an interest in our topic. In reality, it is more likely that a stranger will love our work or be able to help. I have learned that I should send a new work only to those I believe will be interested in the material or will have something constructive to offer me. Fortunately, I have a few of those – people who enjoyed my book, respected the amount of work it took, and passed their copy on to others. Such tiny steps in circulation may one day pay off.

The only response I got to my front page scoop in the local paper was from another self-published author. This turned out to be fortuitous as we joined up to launch the Central Jersey Authors' Alliance. Now a group of ten, we exchange marketing ideas, garner press coverage and share the cost of exhibiting at book events and street fairs. We sell a few copies, meet people, offer encouragement share in disappointments and remind ourselves that not everyone

has the courage to self-publish. In spite of the proliferation of new titles – about 412,000 worldwide in 2007, with more than 275,000 in the US alone – it still takes creativity, fortitude and self-confidence to publish a book without the aid of (dream on!) agent, editor or advance.

I am working on a second book. It's written in prose, not poetry. It's a novel, not an epic poem. I will publish it through a print-on-demand house. My investment will be less and I will have a product which has broader general appeal.

Should I meet with modest success in print, I will produce it on audio. In 2007 audio book sales in the USA rose by 12%, ringing up more than \$1 billion in sales. The really positive news is that the fastest growing segment of the audio book market is young listeners. More than 10,000 new titles are

released on audio each year. A lot of readers are listening to books, both old and new. A lot of time is being spent in sound booths.

I returned to the Kingston studio to record the introduction and credits for *Siege At Sorrel Rift*. I'd always imagined myself in a sound booth with headphones on my ears and a script in my hand. I loved doing it, and, after some practice, I sounded like the confident, successful author I still hope to be.

Now, I just have to work on sales.

Veronica Paulina is the author of *Siege At Sorrel Rift, A Story in Sonnets*. The 90-minute audio book tells the story of a contemporary family in the throes of a divorce. Performed by professional actors and incorporating music and sound effects, this epic poem is presented in a dynamic and innovative format. Available as an audio package from www.veronicapaulina.com (2 CDs and full text) or as a download from www.audible.com. You may contact the author at veronica@veronicapaulina.com.

