

Cultural Daily

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Theater in the Pandemic: Parson's Nose Radio Theater

Hoyt Hilsman · Wednesday, February 24th, 2021

When actors Lance Davis and Mary Chalon launched a theater company from their home in South Pasadena twenty years ago, they never dreamed they would end up doing Radio Theater. For years, the couple, along with a talented ensemble of professional actors with Broadway and Hollywood credits, performed classic comedies by Shakespeare, Moliere and others, adapted by Davis in shorter versions that were more accessible to modern audiences of all ages.

They named their company “Parson’s Nose” after a line in *Romeo and Juliet* in which the fairy queen “tickles the parson’s nose” as he sleeps, and performed in venues all over the Pasadena and Southern California area, from Pasadena Playhouse and the Geffen Playhouse to an open lot in South Pasadena. Finally, after years of searching and thanks to the generosity of local supporters, they found a permanent space in an historic mortuary chapel in Old Pasadena, designed by the famed architect Marston and Van Pelt.

All went well as they performed for loyal audiences, who enjoyed everything from relatively unknown classics to new plays by women and old favorites like the annual *Christmas Carol*. Then came the pandemic, which immediately shut down the theater and left the company puzzled and frustrated. What would be their next step?

Lance and Mary had always been fans of old-time Radio Theater, and had performed skits from some of the classic radio shows like *Flash Gordon* and *The Shadow*. They wondered what it would be like to turn the talents of their company to radio drama and, within a few weeks, they had begun producing radio theater shows that could be enjoyed not only by local theater audiences but by a worldwide audience, on the internet.

So was born Parson’s Nose Radio Theater, with more than seventeen remotely recorded theater podcasts so far from Shakespeare to Mark Twain, and Dickens to Hans Christian Anderson. The podcasts include Parson’s Nose’s popular classic productions, such as Benet’s *Devil and Daniel Webster* and Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*, as well as music-themed podcasts celebrating Cliff Edwards (the voice of Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*) and 60’s political satirist Tom Lehrer.

The Radio Theater podcasts, broadcast over the web, have attracted a loyal following not only locally but around the country. The ingenuity of the Parson’s Nose founders and their dedicated company proves the old saying that “the show must go on,” despite a nasty pandemic. “Alexa, play Parson’s Nose Radio Theater!”

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