

# **RADIO GHOSTS**

Script by Greg Romero  
Music by Mike Vernusky

# RADIO GHOSTS

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## REGARDING SCRIPT AND MUSIC

**RADIO GHOSTS** is a fully theatrical script, written to be performed with an electronic music composition and the two (script and music) **MUST** be performed together. Sound cues can be accessed and downloaded by following the instructions on Page 6 of this script. If assistance is needed, the authors may be contacted for general clarifications or guidance at: [RadioGhostsNSP@gmail.com](mailto:RadioGhostsNSP@gmail.com)

# RADIO GHOSTS

*For:*

To all the spirits who have haunted this play, thank you for believing in us.

## RADIO GHOSTS

*Radio Ghosts* was originally produced by TBA Theatre in Anchorage, Alaska, in June 2023. An additional performance was presented during the Valdez Theater Conference (Dawson Moore, Conference Coordinator) in Valdez, Alaska, in June 2023. The performances featured the following cast:

William Tell.....Ryan Buen  
Lorna Adams Tell/Ocean.....Jessica Faust  
Abernathy/Wolf.....Wayne Mitchell

The production was Directed by Erin Dagon Mitchell, with Set Design by Matt Miller, Lighting Design by Shane Mitchell and Petra Banks, and Costume Design by Megan Bladow Addis. The Props Master was Shane Mitchell and the production Stage Manager was Olivia Phelps. The production was Assistant Directed by Stephanie Buen, who also served as Sound Operator.

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### **Characters (1F, 2 M):**

WILLIAM TELL (M) mid – late 30s, sees holograms, hears waves, feels gravity too late.

LORNA ADAMS TELL/OCEAN (F) early – mid 30s, speaks through and then becomes the Pacific Ocean.

ABERNATHY/WOLF (M) mid – late 60s, carries the rings of Saturn, then becomes a wolf.

### **Time and Place:**

Radio waves. A University classroom. The Universe. A diner. The wilderness. The Pacific Ocean. The forest. Your imagination.

### **About This Collaboration:**

*Radio Ghosts* is a fully dimensional work of theater, intended to be performed by live actors in theatrical space. The performance aspires to be a meeting place between script, electronic music composition, and actors in space.

You will notice the script – in addition to giving voice to the play's characters – also describes how the music sounds. There are moments in which things shift and what seemed like a play becomes something more like a listening experience. This work is made to live fully in these listening spaces, please embrace and enjoy them. To this end, this script **MUST** be performed with the composition.

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### **Instructions for Accessing and Downloading Music:**

Sound cues can be accessed using either of the following links and/or QR code:

<https://tinyurl.com/bdzku8pp>

[bit.ly/4lXm3VL](http://bit.ly/4lXm3VL)



The sound cues are numbered in the script according to their sequence in the play and are placed in the script where the cues need to be triggered.

Notation looks like this: ***SOUND CUE*** ①.

Sound Operators are encouraged to use basic sound-cueing software such as SoundPlant, QLab, MultiPlay, Audio Cues, etc., many of which have free versions. If technical assistance is needed, you may be contact the authors for general clarifications or guidance at: [RadioGhostsNSP@gmail.com](mailto:RadioGhostsNSP@gmail.com)

### **About Breaks in Speech:**

Breaks in speech are noted by a series of ellipses after the character designation. i.e.:

**WOLF. ...**

Each single dot represents one heartbeat. This is space that the character uses to react to what was just said, or to hold back the next thing to say, or both. These are not moments in which to relax or to rush through.

### **About Care:**

Please take care of yourselves, each other, and the audience during the process of working on this play.

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**SOUND CUE ①.** *As audience enters, they are greeted by a universe of voices, all speaking through threads of time and space, telling stories of loss and of losing things. And some of these are also ghost stories. The voices might come from the audience members themselves, sent to the performance ahead of time, and/or through live microphones set-up around the space.*

**SOUND CUE ②.** *Lights and sound shift.*

*A WOLF is sitting on a mountaintop, staring deep across the distance. We hear the rocks and trees speak to each other. The ratty things in the ground. Time, changing speeds here and there, passes, the wind dances through. The Wolf howls along with the wind, perhaps reaching the ocean, lengthening the tides.*

*Lights and sound shift as WILLIAM TELL enters a university classroom carrying a jumbled pile of papers and materials and a portable radio. He sets up a standing easel with a large pad of paper resting on it and speaks as he struggles to put his materials in order.*

**TELL.** Good morning, class. Hi. Good morning. Hello. Today. Class today will. Dr. Abernathy is not in today...he asked me to fill in for him. I mean. I was asked. I don't really know what to say. So I'm just going to keep talking. It was kinda short notice, so I'm not quite as organiz—*(He drops a bunch of materials. He walks to the easel. He writes the name "Tell". He takes a breath.)*

My name is Professor Tell. I'm filling in for Dr. Abernathy. Has everyone had breakfast? *(He writes two words, "break" and "fast" on opposite sides*

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*of the paper. He takes a deep breath.) I am a specialist in holographic theory as method for understanding human construction of the universe.*

**(SOUND CUE ②. A phone rings.)**

*Excuse me. (Tell reaches into a coat pocket and pulls out the receiver end of a rotary phone, attached to a chord, attached to him. He looks at it for a moment. He puts the phone back in his pocket.) Sorry. (Tell stares out into space for a few moments.) This. Uh. (Tell looks at the easel.) I'll show you what I mean. (He draws a picture of the human brain in the center of the paper.)*

*The Human Brain. Most people think it's where we store our memories. (He turns on the portable radio.) Are these memories? (He listens to the radio for a moment.) Technically, these sounds are coming to us from the past. Right? Because it takes time for sound to travel. So these vibrations of sound come to us from another place in time and space. And have already happened. Does that mean they are memories being transmitted through the air? If I picked up my phone— (He takes a cell phone out of his pocket.) --and called my wife in another state. Ex-Wife. If my wife had moved to California and I called her and played this radio to her— (He puts the cell phone next to the radio and some unusual sounds come from the radio. He pulls the cell phone away from the radio. The sounds linger for a moment, then fade.)—would I be broadcasting the future? (He looks at his cell phone. He puts it back in his pocket.)*

*You know what? Forget that idea. Actually...remember it. Pistachio. So how can we remember things? Like the taste of our favorite ice cream? Like the way my ex-wife smelled?...And then, where do these memories go? (He walks to the easel and draws on the paper, turning the brain into an elephant.)*

*Mice in a cage. A maze. Mice in a labyrinth taught us something about brains we never knew. And salamanders. And then salamanders proved it. But first—mice. (Tell walks to the easel and draws a box around the following letters already printed: "r" "a" "t" "s".)*

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In 1946, a neuropsychologist trained a bunch of laboratory rats to run a maze. Then he cut out parts of their brain because he thought he could create a hole in their memory. Because he, like everyone else, understood memory in a way that's totally wrong. We use what we know. Like a shelf of books. Or a filing cabinet.

We know these things, so we force our understanding of everything else into metaphors that are familiar and wrong, basically polishing turds over and over again until our fingers become poo poo lollipops. (*Tell walks to the easel and writes the word "merde" and draws a stick coming out of it.*)

This psychologist was wrong—the rats proved him wrong. Because, if it's true that our brains are bookshelves, wouldn't it be possible to remove things from the mind, just by removing some of the books in the brain?

So in 1946, this psychologist removed some books/shelves from the rats. But the rats were smarter than the psychologist. Because the rats still knew the maze. The rats still knew the entire maze, even with pieces of their brains bleeding in the garbage can. The psychologist tried repeatedly to stump them, removing different parts of their brains (different books, different shelves)—trying to find the specific location where the memory of the maze was stored in the rat's minds. But he couldn't do it. Because the brain is not a book of shelves. Or a filing cabinet. Not even in a mouse. Because the brain, like everything else, is a hologram. (*Tell walks to the easel and draws a circle encompassing everything written and drawn on the paper.*)

Everything is one thing—everything is in everything and it is all part of the whole big one thing. Do you believe this?

Raise your hand if you believe this.

Interesting.

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So the rats, the maze, and their brains teach us that memories are not localized in specific parts of the brain like a filing cabinet. Instead, every single memory lives in every single part of the brain. If you were able to look at the neural pathways of the brain, they would look more like tree branches and roots systems than anything else. Pretty mind-blowing idea, right?

Like any mind-blowing idea, these findings made rival scientists line up, aiming to shoot holes through it.

Mind-blowing. Shoot holes....(**SOUND CUE ③**. *Tell's phone rings.*)

Excuse me. (*He takes the phone receiver out of his pocket. He looks at it for a moment. It rings again. He puts the receiver back in his pocket.*)

I'm sorry. (**SOUND CUE ④**. *The radio begins to change frequencies, landing on white noise. As Tell goes to turn the dial, we hear a child's voice: "Papa?" Tell freezes.*)

Hello? (*Silence within the white noise. Tell addresses the class.*) I'm sorry. (*Tell stares out into space.*)

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** Hello?

(**SOUND CUE ⑤**. *Lights and sound shift to LORNA. She speaks across a great distance of time and space. She is wearing rubber boots. She is visibly, gloriously pregnant. We hear the sounds of nature surrounding her. The rustle of wind through the trees. Frogs belching across the water. A wood thrush calling.*)

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Do you want to take a walk with me?

**TELL.** ...

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**LORNA.** I found a secret path that leads to a cute, little pond. It's kind of hidden and quiet. There are some live oak trees I want to show you. Some of their large limbs, full of Spanish moss, bend down and reach the ground. Good for climbing.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** The cattails are in bloom and ready for harvesting. Like they are kindly offering themselves. We could wade out into the water and take them in.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** *(as she holds them up)* Look! I have an extra pair of boots!

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Hello?

*(SOUND CUE ⑤ OFF. Lights and sound shift back to the classroom, where Tell is standing, staring out into space. Lorna is gone.)*

**TELL.** ...Sorry. ... Memory. Brains. Mice. Salamanders!

Did you know that you could remove a salamander's brain and it would stay alive? You can. The brainless salamander doesn't really do anything—it's just kind of there. But when you put the brain back in, the salamander's behavior eventually returns to normal. The biologist who discovered this was actually trying to prove the 1946 mice memory experiment wrong. Because he thought distributed memory was as ridiculous as my ex-wife having sex with me again on top of my car.

So this biologist experimented on salamanders and their feeding patterns, performing seven hundred operations, slicing, dicing, shuffling, and mincing salamander brains over and over again. Every time he replaced these minced-up brains—the salamanders recovered, and went back to its normal feeding pattern, just like nothing was wrong.

Pretty interesting information.

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Things can go back to normal, can go back to the way they were, just like nothing was wrong. (**SOUND CUE ⑥**. *Tell's phone rings.*) Hello?

...

Mice. Salamanders. Brains. Holograms. Bookshelves. Filing cabinets. Trees. (*Tell's phone rings.*) Hello?

**ABERNATHY.** William.

(**SOUND CUE ⑦**. *Lights shift to Dr. Harold ABERNATHY, who is, all at once, a professor in his mid-60s, and a Wolf, sitting in an abandoned greasy-spoon diner that is also a wilderness. He stares out of the window while listening to the cross-dimensional sounds of the diner colliding with the wild sounds of nature.*)

**SOUND CUE ⑧ JOINS SOUND CUE ⑦.** *We hear Lorna's voice coming in and out of time and place:)*

**LORNA.** Can I get you something to drink? Cream? Here...I think it's local. Los Armadillos or something. Did you want dessert? Uh...peach. Peach and uh...banana. Sir? Another fork? More coffee? Are you waiting for another...guest?

(*Tell enters.*)

**TELL.** Dr. Abernathy?

**ABERNATHY.** Hi, William.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** It's been a while.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** How are you?

**TELL.** This is kind of a weird place to meet.

**ABERNATHY.** ...

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**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** Would you like a slice of peach pie?

**TELL.** You had something to tell me, Professor?

**ABERNATHY.** Do you want to sit down?

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** How would you feel about taking over my class?

**TELL.** “The Physical Universe”?

**ABERNATHY.** You remember it.

**TELL.** You fucking failed me.

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** Not long ago, I started seeing things. Everything looks different.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** Once I really started seeing, I knew the most important thing was to keep my eyes open. So I had the idea to hold them open with my fingers, like this (*Abernathy demonstrates*). I remember thinking I had the rings of Saturn in my hands. And that’s what was keeping my eyes open.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** Do you remember when we studied the rings of Saturn in class?

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** Seriously?

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** You want to talk about the rings of Saturn?

**ABERNATHY.** What do you remember?

**TELL.** I know more than you.

**ABERNATHY.** Interesting. Good.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** Galileo, with a telescope, was probably the first to see them.

**ABERNATHY.** Good.

**TELL.** They’re probably between ten million and a hundred million years old. Which is a lot younger than their planet, which is about 4 billion years

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old. The rings are mostly made of ice, maybe a little rock. Tholins and silicates.

**ABERNATHY.** Yes, good.

**TELL.** The Cassini probe—which you never told us about—suggests that the rings might have been bigger at one time. They’re slowly shrinking. They might eventually disappear.

**ABERNATHY.** Yes. Good, William.

**TELL.** I’m not teaching your stupid class, Dr. Abernathy.

**ABERNATHY.** There are gaps in the rings.

**TELL.** I know.

**ABERNATHY.** And these gaps are caused by the gravitational pull of Saturn’s moons.

**TELL.** I know.

**ABERNATHY.** And the moons have names like Prometheus and Pandora. Atlas. Janus. In the Encke Gap of Saturn’s rings there’s a moon named “Pan”, who is the god of the wild!

**TELL.** So?

**ABERNATHY.** Why do we call it that? The god of the wild is a moon in the gap of Saturn’s rings, holding my eyes open, like this: (*Abernathy demonstrates again.*)

**TELL.** So?

**ABERNATHY.** Look at our moon. (*Abernathy points to it in the sky.*)

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** So?

**ABERNATHY.** Tonight it’s a full moon. And it’s red because of how light is being refracted through the atmosphere.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** So we call it a Blood Wolf Full Moon.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** You see what I mean?

**TELL.** You haven’t spoken to me in eight years. And you want to talk about Saturn’s rings? Wolf moons?

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** Eight years!

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**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** Nothing?

**ABERNATHY.** ... *(Tell begins to exit.)* Wait!

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** I couldn't talk to you before.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** I couldn't see how.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** Just listen.

**TELL.** ...

**ABERNATHY.** ...

**TELL.** Listen to what?

**ABERNATHY.** ...

*(SOUND CUE ⑨. A gunshot fires, in slow-motion, and travels through space. Tell can't stop it. We hear the child's voice again, "Papa".)*

**LORNA.** *(seeing the violence in the kitchen)* William!!

*(SOUND CUE ⑩. Lights shift. Tell stands in the classroom. Tell's phone rings. Tell's phone rings. Tell's phone rings.)*

**TELL.** Excuse me. *(He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a gun. This surprises him. He puts the gun back in his pocket.)* Sorry. *(Tell takes a deep breath.)*

Soooooo....how many of you have ever tripped out on mushrooms?

If you have...let's...let's...just...actually...don't tell me...but. Ok.

Let's go back to the radio. But first—Time. *(Tell walks to the easel, turns to a blank page on the drawing pad, and draws a dot.)*

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If this dot represents right now, are we to assume that time works like this?  
*(Starting with the dot, he draws a straight, horizontal line from the left to the right side of the page.)*

Let's just pretend for a moment that this is actually true. Then—considering the time it takes for sound to travel - three hundred forty-four meters per second - and considering the FCC-mandated tape-delay, a “live” radio broadcast would be this:

*(He draws a dot above and just to the left of the first line and draws a parallel horizontal line.)*

This means that the radio is perpetually broadcasting the past. In a space of time pretending to be the present moment. So how can we trust that we ever really know where we are in time?

I wish. I... *(Tell walks to the easel where the two timelines are drawn.)*

Everything is about what we do with time. Even radio. Because of frequency. An AM radio frequency is determined by how many thousands of cycles per second a signal is broadcasting. *(On the left-hand side of the top timeline he writes the number, “535”. On the right-hand side of the top timeline he writes the number, “1700”).*

An FM station is the same thing, but the frequencies are in millions of cycles per second. *(On the left-hand side of the bottom timeline he writes the number, “88”. On the right-hand side of the bottom timeline he writes the number, “108”).*

If I wanted to listen to the University radio station, I would turn my dial here. *(He draws in the number 90.5, approximating where it would fall on the dial.)*

And I would be able to hear anything broadcast through this station. Right? Well...no. I could only hear sounds within the frequency range of twenty hertz to twenty thousand hertz. Because those are the auditory limits of what

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humans can hear. (*Tell draws a line representing this spectrum and writes the word “humans”.*)

But what happens outside of that range? Sound doesn't stop happening just because humans stop hearing it. (*Tell extends the line a little bit further and writes the word, “canis”.*)

Dogs can hear sounds with frequencies as high as fifty thousand hertz. (*Tell extends the line further and writes the word, “chiroptera”.*)

Bats can hear frequencies as high as a hundred thousand hertz. Isn't that something?

Dogs and bats are getting a much fuller experience of the world than humans. And mice and salamanders teach us about our own brains. Bookshelves my ass! So what do dogs and bats and trees hear that we don't? What if someone was trying really hard to talk to us but we just couldn't hear it? What happens out here? (*He indicates the frequencies outside of the timeline.*) And here? (*He indicates the frequencies outside of the canvas.*)

(*He turns the dial on the radio to a frequency broadcasting white noise.*) And what happens in between these frequencies? Inside of the spaces where all we hear is white noise? (*The dial frequencies shift back and forth on the radio.*) What is going on outside of what we think we know?

(*From inside the white noise:*)

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** If we could hear what a dolphin or an elephant hears, what would we find? (**SOUND CUE** ⑪. *Tell's phone rings.*)

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** Hello?

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*(The portable radio continues to play. The frequencies shift around the radio dial, finally landing on white noise. Inside of the white noise we hear:)*

**LORNA.** William.

*(SOUND CUE ⑫. Lights up on LORNA standing at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.)*

**LORNA.** William.

**TELL.** Lorna?

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** I miss you.

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** I'm feeling really lost right now.

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** I just want to hear your voice for a minute.

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** Please.

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** Hello?

*(Tell and Lorna look across the distance at each other, listening to the ocean waves.)*

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** Can you just talk to me for a minute?

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** Please.

**LORNA.** I told you not to call me.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** I'm hanging up.

**TELL.** ...

*(SOUND CUE ⑬. Lights and sound shift to a forest in the Northern Rockies. The wind changes as it passes through a different range of mountains.)*

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*Lorna, visibly and gloriously pregnant, breathes in this air for a moment, looking into the forest canopy. A different wood thrush calls out. A pileated woodpecker is breaking things loose. As they walk through the forest together:)*

**LORNA.** All these trees. Look at them. They're really beautiful.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** That's a lodgepole pine. *Pinus contorta*. It's similar to a Ponderosa, but it has a slimmer trunk. *(She takes a pinecone from a pocket.)* See its cone? It's kind of a strange shape. In a fire, the lodgepole pinecone opens up, releasing its seed. The seed falls to the ground, growing new lodgepoles. Fire, heat, keeps the species going.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** That's a Douglas fir. Its genus is *Pseudotsuga*, because it's a false fir. It's actually also a pine tree.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Those really tall ones—those are White firs. *Abies concolor*. Their lower branches are really hospitable to nesting birds and animals. If you look closely, you might see a spotted owl. Sooty grouse. Pacific fisher. Sometimes people call White firs, “piss” firs.

**TELL.** Like, piss as in “pee”?

*(Lorna laughs.)*

**LORNA.** Yes.

**TELL.** Why?

**LORNA.** If you cut one open, it smells like cat piss. And also, their sap is pretty...voluminous.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Look at the branches.

**TELL.** Ok.

**LORNA.** “All the branches of a tree at every stage of its height, when put together, are equal in thickness to the trunk below them.”

**TELL.** Really?

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**LORNA.** We learned this from Leonardo da Vinci. He saw trees through his artist's eyes. Because of this, trees have perfect balance. They resist gravity better. They are less prone to being knocked down.

**TELL.** You're really beautiful.

**LORNA.** ...

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** These might be my favorite. The Quaking Aspen. *Populus tremuloides*. Look at the integrity of their trunks. The white bark. Look how tall some of them are. I admire that. And their colors! When the seasons change, their leaves become really vibrant yellows and reds; the leaves are an explosion of beautiful colors before they fall to the ground.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** And the sound.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Listen.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** They're called "quakies" because of how they move when the wind—like now—passes through them.

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** Can you hear them?

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** William?

**TELL.** ...

**LORNA.** William?

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS--  
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