

## Why the Popularity of Audio Books?

Libraries around the United States report that the growth in the circulation of audio books is outpacing overall circulation. The market for children's audio books is especially strong.

"It started exploding five years ago," said Peg Errington, the collection development coordinator at the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.

"It's one more example of our multi-tasking society," added Errington, who has noticed even library employees' increased use of audio books.

- Audio books represented an \$800 million business in 2003, Mary Beth Roche, president of the Audio Publishers Association, told the Christian Science Monitor.

- Though most traditional publishers launched audio book divisions about 20 years ago, according to the Monitor, much of today's growth comes from audio downloads.

In fact, Audible.com, the leading provider of digital books, last year did \$34 million in business, and predicts that could grow to \$65 million this year.

- Half of Audible.com's subscribers are new to audio books, and may be lured to them because of cool devices like the iPod. (The iPod Shuffle, for example, can hold up to four books at a time.)

- The Algonquin Hotel in New York, once home to Dorothy Parker and her roundtable of writers, offers guests loaner iPods preloaded by hotel staff from a selection of classics and best sellers.

- The "Netflix" of audio books is Simply Audiobooks, based in Oakville, Ont. Members pay a monthly fee, sign up via the Internet for the audio books they want, then wait for them to arrive by mail. When they are done, they mail them back (there's no due date) and wait for the next one to arrive.

Even though sales of audio books have increased every year, they still represent only 3 percent of books sold. Still, audio lovers are noticing that more titles are being recorded, stores and libraries are improving and enlarging audio book displays, and more books are coming out on CD than ever before.

Traditional book lovers insist nothing compares to the experience of putting eyes to paper and soaking in the prose. Audio lovers, on the other hand, insist they are drawn into the story on an intimate level that can only be experienced when being read to - while they are cooking, ironing, driving, mowing the lawn or otherwise occupied.

Often it is the reader that makes the audio experience so special. Such is the case for the audio version of "No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency" in which reader Lisette Lecat brings lead character Precious Ramotswe delightfully to life.

Sometimes, no matter what you are doing, you have to stop and listen to the story. These are known as "driveway moments," and I've had my share.

In many instances, authors want to read their own books, and in the cases of Bill Clinton ("My Life"), Frank McCourt ("Angela's Ashes") and Ruth Reichl (all three of her memoirs, including the newest, "Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise"), they do a fine job.

Others would do better to hire a reader. Hillary Rodham Clinton's memoir, "Living History," might have been extraordinarily successful, but she sure didn't sound comfortable reading it.

Which leads us to these questions: Can a bad reader ruin an audio book experience? And, can a great reader save a bad book?

A current "chick lit" title, "The Right Address," by Carrie Karasyov and Jill Kargman, wouldn't be worth the bargain-basement price I paid for it except for the talents of reader Barbara Rosenblat (an Audiofile magazine "Golden Voice of the 20th Century") who turned a truly silly story about nasty socialites into a lark.

Fans of audio books certainly don't think they should replace printed books. But they are an enjoyable way to have several books going at one time.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

#### About the Author

Joe knows a good book when he hears one. Check out his latest book/audiobook blog: <http://www.1234books.com>