

The Pillowman – Best Scripted Programming (Subcity Radio)

Little green pigs, men made of pillows, severed toes and child killings all feature in Martin McDonagh's deliciously dark black comedy, *The Pillowman*. Premiered on stage in 2003, this is the first and only radio adaptation to date.

A writer in a totalitarian dictatorship is quizzed on a number of his short stories that have manifested themselves in a series of grim re-enactments. Angered and frustrated at his interrogators insistence of his guilt, Katurian's rage begins to reach paramount when he discovers his captors are also holding his mentally handicapped brother, Michael, in the cell next to him. Katurian then narrates *The Writer and the Writer's Brother* to the audience (included as audio excerpt), an autobiographical tale outlining how Michael was kept locked up in the room next to Katurian's bedroom and tortured nightly for 7 years as part of his parents sick experiment in an attempt to create, in their other son, a talented yet twisted writer; an experiment that worked. Thrown into the same cell, Katurian begins to realise the effects of reading his stories to his brother as Michael reveals himself as the real life perpetrator of Katurian's disturbed fantasies. Forced into a confession by the state police in order to protect his life's work, Katurian lovingly smothers the monster he has created in Michael before the detectives blow his brains all over the floor; cue post-humus narration allowing the play to end in the writer's uniquely "downbeat mode".

Adapting this play for radio was a difficult and time consuming process; the largest challenge being to place all stage directions and visual action into the mouths of the characters without disrupting the flow and distinctive voices given to each character by the original playwright. Due to the play's content and the power of imagination, focus was placed squarely on the story-telling aspects of the play; incorporating sound effects and silences in order to allow the listener's mind to become the stage upon which the horrid deeds depicted could be acted out. Performers were hand-picked from a pool of actors available to the station and were selected on the basis of previous performances as well as vocal suitability to the roles. The role of Tupolski went through a gender-transformation between stage and radio owing, in equal parts, to the talent of the female performer that landed the role and a desire to adjust the gender bias inherent in the play (as it originally has no female characters).

The play was recorded in one all day session, with the emphasis on rehearsal and prior preparation to avoid excessive retakes or time-consuming editing. Despite this it still took many hours of gruelling post-production to produce the finished two hour play. Many minor editorial adjustments were made, sound effects were added, and the suitably unsettling signature music was introduced to bring structure to the play as it sways between storytelling fantasy and its brutal reality.

The full play is available as a podcast from our website along with another play, *One Way Pendulum*, which was produced in a similar fashion later this year.