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SF PERUSALS

I Read the News Today

A Play in One Act

Willy Russell

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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I READ THE NEWS TODAY

First broadcast on BBC School Radio in the series "Listening and Writing" on 4th February, 1977

CHARACTERS

Ross, a local radio disc jockey
Voice (of a radio commercial)
Ronny (a youth on the run)
Police Constable
Police Sergeant
Newscaster
Interviewer

Willy Russell is indebted to the Beatles for the title of this play, taken from their song of the same title

I READ THE NEWS TODAY

SCENE 1

A local radio station

Ross, a disc jockey, is at the microphone

Ross OK. That's er . . . my Record of the Week. Don't think it'll be too long before that one's riding high in the national charts.

Music

And this is Paul Ross, with you until the crack of dawn. And tonight, I've got a deserted studio. Night Spin, tonight—it's just between ourselves . . . Let's cut out for a short break, before I bring you the news.

Voice (*on tape*) An orchestra? A band? A group? No. Just one man and one instrument can produce the sounds you hear. The SOUNDPACK! A revolution in music. With absolutely no knowledge of music. YOU can produce sounds like this.

Muzak

And this.

Muzak

SOUNDPACK is not just an instrument. It's a band at your fingertips. Have you ever wanted to produce great music, but not known how? Then SOUNDPACK is for you. SOUNDPACK—no knowledge of music required. SOUNDPACK—available at music shops, and most large department stores.

Muzak fades

Ross OK, Paul Ross back with you here on Night Spin. And it's time for the halfway news. (*He takes on a more formal news reader voice*) A dramatic escape in the city today. After being sentenced to eighteen months detention, a local youth made his escape from police who were leading him from the city's magistrates' court. The youth, Ronald Arthur Heron, made his

successful bid for freedom by jumping from a moving police van after magistrates had convicted him of causing more than five thousand pounds' worth of damage to goods in a local warehouse. In an act of what the magistrates called "mammoth, unprovoked, mindless vandalism", Heron had single-handedly smashed an entire floor of goods belonging to Pine Cash and Carry Ltd. A police spokesman said that he expected Heron to be apprehended "before very long". Local ratepayers met council officials tonight in an effort to reduce rates in the city. A spokesman . . . a spoke . . .

Ronny enters, brandishing a gun

There is a scuffle and the radio transmission is cut

Ronny Don't move! Right, just don't move, or y' dead. Right?

Ross Am I movin', man? Eh? Look, I mean . . . I'm not moving. Don't shoot me. Please, whatever you want, you can have it. Don't shoot me . . . please.

Ronny I won't shoot, if you don't move. I don't wanna hurt you, so just be a good lad, an' do as y' told . . . Right . . . slowly . . . move that chair back . . . Listen, mate . . . tell me the truth. Is there any rope, tape, anythin' like that in here?

Ross (*terrified*) I don't know . . . man, I . . . I don't know . . .

Ronny What's up with you? Are y' gonna cry? I'm not gonna hurt you. Are you worried about the gun? Well, just be a good lad, an' I won't have to fire it. Come on, is there any rope in here?

Ross What for?

Ronny What for? What d'you think for? So we can play skippin' games! I wanna tie you up, that's what for.

Ross There's . . . there's cable . . . you could use that.

Ronny Good thinkin', Batman.

Ross Look . . . there's some spare cable down there . . .

Ronny Get up slowly, an' pass it to me.

Ross I hope you . . . I hope you realize that when you cut the transmission you probably alerted half the city that something was wrong down here.

Ronny That's all right. Sit down there. As soon as I've got your feet tied to this post, you'll be goin' back on an' tellin' them it was just a technical hitch. Right? You just tell them it was a fault, an' then stick an LP on. All right, put y' feet together. Right, now tie them to that post.

Ross You've not gone to all this trouble just to get something played on the radio have you?
Ronny Don't try an' be smart, you.
Ross I'm sorry, man . . . Look, I just . . .
Ronny All right. Yeah. Maybe I am doin' all this just t' get something played on the radio. Not a record though. I couldn't care less about records. Just put anythin' on. But listen, mate. Do anythin' wrong an' you get this . . . straight through the head. Right?
Ross Look, man . . . I've told you . . . I'll do just what you say, and nothing more . . . honestly.
Ronny Right. I'll tell you what to say.

Scene 2

A police station

Constable 'Ey, Sarge.
Sergeant What?
Constable I've just had about half a dozen calls sayin' the local radio station went off the air without any warnin'.
Sergeant Well, why are they ringin' us? Tell them to ring the radio station. Not the police station. We're coppers here. Not electricians. I don't know . . .
Constable They said they can't get through. The telephone line's dead, as well.
Sergeant Wouldn't you think we had enough to cope with, eh? Get the transistor out the back. Let's have a listen.

Scene 3

The radio studio

Ronny An' when you've told them that, I want you to put the record on. Then switch it so that it's only the record that's goin' out of here. I don't want them to hear us. Right?
Ross I'll do whatever you say . . .
Ronny Good. 'Cos I don't wanna have to shoot you. OK. Go on.

Ross Paul Ross . . . er . . . here again with . . . er . . . apologies for the loss of transmission. We've got the engineers in here trying to sort out what went wrong, and . . . er . . . well, here's a record while they try and sort out the problem.

SCENE 4

The police station

Sergeant What did I tell you? Put it off. I hate that rubbish.
Constable Sorry, Sarge, but we had to . . .

SCENE 5

The radio station

Ronny All right. OK, pal. Now just take it easy.

SCENE 6

The police station

Sergeant 'Ey! Hold on. Just switch that up.

SCENE 7

The radio studio

Ronny (*pointing to the panel of controls*) 'Ey! What's that switch? It's still up.
Ross Which switch?
Ronny Which switch? That switch.
Ross Look man. You want the record transmitting. We can't transmit anything without that.
Ronny Those microphones aren't on, are they?

Ross Of course not. Look, I'll speak into them. If they were live, you'd hear it amplified in the studio . . .

Ronny You just leave them alone. I'll try them, not you. Hello . . . hello . . . testin' one, two, three, testin' . . .

Ross I've told you man, they're dead. The only thing going out is the record.

Ronny Yeah . . . What's in that, that cubicle over there?

Ross That's the teleprinter. The news comes in on that.

Ronny I'm gonna have a look. Don't try anythin'. (*He goes to the cubicle*)

Scene 8

The police station

Constable Shall I get a car round, Sarge?

Sergeant Eh? What for?

Constable Well you just heard it.

Sergeant What you talking about? It's just a play isn't it? That's all. Switch it off.

Scene 9

The radio station

Ross (*speaking into the microphone*) A gun . . . he's got a . . . gun . . . he's got a . . .

The sound of paper rustling is heard from the cubicle

Ronny 'Ey . . . they're still lookin' for me.

Ross What?

Ronny Look, it's just come through on that typin' machine "Local police are still on the lookout for the youth who escaped outside the city magistrates' court today. The youth, Ronald Arthur Heron, had been convicted of causing more than five thousand pounds' worth of damage to goods belonging to Pine Cash and Carry Ltd."

Ross What! You mean that's you?

Ronny Course it is. An' this: listen. "Reports just coming in that the same warehouse was vandalized tonight. As yet no confirmation of a link between the two items."

Ross What? You escaped, then went back and did it again?

Ronny Yeah.

Ross Listen, man. Why hang around here, then? Why don't you split, now?

Ronny They'd only catch me, wouldn't they?

Ross But look, man, can't you see that you'll be caught if you hang around here?

Ronny You think I'm thick, don't you? Course I can see that. I'll get caught. I know that. But not till I've told them.

Ross Told who?

Ronny Them ... the people out there. The listeners. See, they never let anyone talk, y'know. Know that magistrate, that judge who did me today, eh? I tried to tell him, I did, you know. But he wouldn't listen. They never do, you know. I tried. I tried to tell him so's it'd get in the papers, an' that. No chance, though. He just started shoutin' an' abusin' me, didn't he. You know the form. "Mindless". "Vandal". "Unprovoked". "Senseless". You know, all that stuff. An' I was tryin' to tell him. There was no way he was gonna listen. No way. That's why I did a bunk. It's all lies, you know.

Ross What is?

Ronny All of it. It's all lies that they tell you. Like you. You're a liar!

Ross Listen, man ...

Ronny You are, you know. Like all the stuff you put out over the radio. It's all lies, isn't it? All lies an' cheatin' an' that. Rubbish it is.

Ross Look, I just play the records, and ...

Ronny I know what you do. I've listened to you. You even played a dedication for me once. *San Quentin* by Johnny Cash. D'you remember?

Ross Well ... er ... we get lots of requests for dedications ...

Ronny For me mam an' our Billy it was. Don't you remember?

Ross Yeah, yeah, I think I do ... yeah ... it's coming back, now.

Ronny Liar! You never remember anythin' like that. You don't give a thought for anyone who writes in to you. You just read out their dedications, an' then forget about them. You didn't even play *San Quentin*. You played *Boy Named Sue* instead.

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