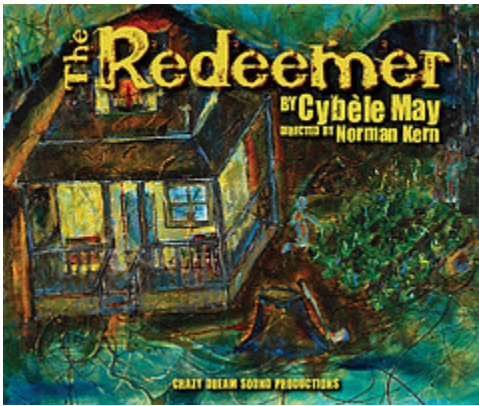


Listen closely: Norman Kern creates a play for your ears

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by Chad Jones, [S.F. Theater Examiner](#)



Theatrical sound designer Norman Kern has taken his expertise in a new direction: his Crazy Dream Sound Productions has recorded its first audio play, Cybele May's "The Redeemer," on a two-disc set. (cover painting by Sally Ann Rodriguez)

Norman Kern's soothing voice tells you what to do: "Sit back, let your ears become your eyes and enjoy our play."

So begins celebrated Bay Area sound designer Kern's latest project: the audio play "[The Redeemer](#)," now available as a two-disc set, the first release from Kern's Crazy Dream Sound Productions.

The Martinez-based Kern, who grew up in Livermore, has spent 30-some years doing sound work for theaters all around the Bay Area as well as serving as a recording engineer, a filmmaker and a director.

About 15 years ago, while working on "I Hate Hamlet" with the [Town Hall Theatre Company](#) in Lafayette, it suddenly struck him that [Paul Rudnick's](#) comedy would make a great audio play.

"I started thinking seriously about audio plays," Kern says over lunch. "I knew it would be costly because I wanted to use Union actors, but I have my own recording studio, and the more I thought about it, the more serious I got."

Kern made a bold move and approached Rudnick and his people about making "I Hate Hamlet" his first audio play project. "They turned me down cold," he says.

So Kern turned to Playscripts, Inc. (www.playscripts.com) and started looking for plays. He came upon [Cybele May's](#) "The Redeemer," which he describes as a "gem." The two-person play is set on a mountain near Shamokin, Penn., a rural coal-mining community.

Connie Aisling is a troubled young woman who keeps to herself on the mountainside. She has psychic visions and has used her tortuous gift to help police in the past. When Detective Stewart Grant arrives at her door, he's seeking information about a missing boy.

Connie's visions reveal horrors to come for the boy if the police don't act quickly, but those same visions also reveal troubling information about the detective's dark past.

It's a tense, hour-long play that lends itself perfectly to Kern's expert audio treatment.

When Kern approached Cybele, who has worked for CBS television as a script reader and now writes novels and blogs about candy at [Candyblog](#), she was enthusiastic.

"She jumped all over it," Kern says.

After a week of rehearsal with actors Anna Bullard and [Darren Bridgett](#), Kern recorded the play in a day.

"We recorded two full run-throughs, and then just recorded bits and pieces," Kern explains.

The finished product, in its certified "green" eco-friendly case, includes a bonus disc with Kern interviewing playwright May and the actors. The \$24.95 package is available through Kern's Web site and through [Facebook](#). This distribution method, Kern admits, is "grass roots." But efforts are being made to make the audio play available on the big sites such as Amazon.com and at Barnes and Noble.

But don't ask Kern about iTunes.

"The compromise in sound quality is too much," the sound expert says.

He also implores his listening audience to listen to "The Redeemer" at home and not in the car. That way you can better appreciate how beautifully engineered the play is. Every last bird chirp, owl hoot, gravely footstep or cricket peep is artfully placed, and it would be a shame to miss any of the incredible soundscape.

Kern's hard work has paid off handsomely. It is easy to get lost in the tense, spooky, occasionally bloody world of "The Redeemer." Bullard and Bridgett are superb in their roles such that it's hard to imagine them being any better on stage because the intimacy of the recording captures every nuance of emotion.

May's play itself is gripping – dark and violent – and it's no surprise to learn the play is part of a trilogy based loosely on Sophocles' "The Theban Plays." There's something quite juicy about the notion of a tortured psychic and the brooding detective that makes their connection seem fated, and the tense story of a child in jeopardy makes it impossible to turn your attention away while you're listening.

"The idea is like old-fashioned radio," Kern says. "You want to sit down and just listen. The act of listening is an act of creativity. We work a part of our brains that don't usually get worked in our busy days. The sound design for this was more difficult than anything I've ever done for stage or film."

If all goes well with "The Redeemer," Kern and his Crazy Dream Sound Productions hope to release up to six audio plays a year.

"I'd like to use all local actors," Kern says. "We have such an amazing talent pool here."

For more info: You can listen to a sample of "The Redeemer" and order a copy at <http://www.crazydreamsound.com/redeemer/home.htm> or on Face book at <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=54193070345>

Topics: [theater news](#) , [Crazy Dream Sound Productions](#)

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Chad Jones has been covering theater in the Bay Area since 1992. He was the theater critic for the Oakland Tribune, Tri-Valley Herald and the San Mateo County Times. His work has appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle and Theatre Bay Area magazine and he is the author of Web site, Chad Jones' Theater Dogs.

