THE DRAMA MERCHANT · THE RADIOPLAY HOUR

presents

The 24hr Wireless Project



PARTICIPANT PACK · NEW YEAR'S EVE EDITION

6pm Wednesday 30 to 6pm Thursday 31 December 2026 (AEST)

A golden-age radio challenge for the last 24 hours of the year

24 hours. One sound effect. Your story on the air.

thedramamerchant.com.au · @thedramamerchant

CHANNEL 01

Welcome: ready to make some noise?

Welcome to the 24hr Wireless Project. On New Year's Eve you'll write, record and (if you choose) edit an original radio play in a single day, built around a Drama Merchant sound effect and a theme. Then, during Premiere Week, starting Sunday 10 January, it goes to air alongside everyone else's on The Radioplay Hour. This free pack has everything you need to decide, register and get ready.

Don't just see the year out. Make something of it. That's the whole idea. It doesn't need to be polished or long. It just needs to be yours, and finished.

Who can enter? Anyone. Go solo, or create with your friends and family. Entries are also open to amateur and independent theatre companies. For theatre groups, it's a fun way to get your members creating together over the break, and your sign-off on air is a chance to invite listeners to come and join you.

> **How to enter:** Everything happens on the **24hr Wireless page** on The Drama Merchant website, **thedramamerchant.com.au**: registering, paying, the Transmission, submitting, Premiere Week and voting. **Registrations open Tuesday 1 December** and close at 11:59pm AEST on Tuesday 29 December. Entry is **$5 per entry, solo or group**, paid securely through Wix checkout or PayPal when you register. Every dollar goes into running the project.
>
> **Places are limited to 25 entries, first in, first served.** Once they're full, join the waitlist. We'll let you know if a place opens up, and you'll be first to hear about the next 24hr Wireless Project.

Key dates

All times are Queensland time (AEST). In NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT, add one hour for daylight saving.

WHAT	WHEN (AEST)
Registrations open	Tuesday 1 December 2026
Registrations close	6:00pm Tuesday 29 December 2026
The Transmission sent: the clock starts	6:00pm Wednesday 30 December 2026
Submissions close	6:00pm Thursday 31 December 2026
Late entries close (not eligible for awards)	11:59pm Thursday 31 December 2026
Class of 2026 announced on the 24hr Wireless page and Instagram	Friday 1 January 2027
Premiere Week: one episode every night on the 24hr Wireless page	7:00pm Sunday 10 to Saturday 16 January 2027
Voting open, and every entry goes up on YouTube	Sunday 17 January to 11:59pm Sunday 24 January 2027
Winners announced	Sunday 31 January 2027

Running late? You can still submit until 11:59pm AEST as a late entry. Late entries go to air in Premiere Week and you're still part of the Class of 2026, but they aren't eligible for awards. Set an alarm for 5pm so you have time to export and upload on time.

CHANNEL 02

How the 24 hours work

1 **The Transmission arrives.** At 6:00pm AEST on Wednesday 30 December, the station sends a telegram-style brief to your inbox and the 24hr Wireless page: your Drama Merchant sound effect and the theme. The clock starts.

2 **Make your piece.** Write and record an original audio piece built around the sound effect and the theme. Studio entries can edit it too.

3 **Submit by 6pm.** Send in the submission form with your link by 6:00pm AEST on Thursday 31 December, then go and celebrate.

4 **Hear it on air.** You're named in the Class of 2026 on New Year's Day. During Premiere Week, from Sunday 10 January, a new episode airs each night on the 24hr Wireless page with three or four entries, until every piece has been heard. Then voting opens, and every entry goes up on our YouTube playlist, where it stays for people to listen to.

Your Transmission

TRANSMISSION · STOP · FILL IN WHEN IT ARRIVES · STOP	
SOUND EFFECT	*this year's Drama Merchant sound effect, the heart of your piece*
THEME	

FINE BEFOREHAND	ONLY INSIDE THE 24 HOURS
Testing your microphone and software, finding a quiet place to record, lining up your cast or group, practising playing a sound from a second device, rehearsing a live take, brainstorming how you like to work.	Writing the script, recording any voices or sounds, editing and mixing (Studio only), choosing and adding music.

CHANNEL 03

Making your piece

You don't need a studio. Pick whichever approach suits you.

If you have recording and editing software

Audacity, GarageBand, Audition, Reaper or similar. This is the **Studio** category (see Channel 04).

- Record your voices, then add the sound effect and any music in your editor.
- Use the Drama Merchant sound effect as provided. You can adjust its volume and length, but keep it recognisable.

If you only have a phone or tablet

Recording on a phone or tablet in **one live take, with no editing**? That's the **Make-Do** category (see Channel 04).

- Record straight into the voice memo app as you perform, start to finish.
- Play the sound effect or music from a second device while you record.
- Do a 10-second test first and listen back on a speaker before recording the whole piece.

Getting good sound anywhere

- Record somewhere soft and quiet. A wardrobe full of clothes or a doona over your head works wonders.
- Recording outside is welcome too. A backyard, a beach or a bush track can give your piece a real sense of place. Find shelter from the wind, cup the microphone with your hand or use a foam cover, and listen out for traffic, planes and barking dogs.
- Keep the microphone about a hand-span from your mouth, slightly to one side.
- Turn off fans, air-conditioning and phone notifications.
- Studio entries: leave a second of silence before and after each take so it's easy to edit.
- Listen back on a speaker, not just headphones. Old-time radio was made to fill the lounge room from the wireless, so aim for a piece that sounds just as good on a TV or speaker as it does in earphones.

> **Solo or group:** Work alone or with others. Solo entries are welcome. In a group, everyone must record together, in the same place, at the same time, and you name one person as the group contact for submitting. Amateur and independent theatre companies are very welcome to enter as a group.

> **Music:** Only use music you're allowed to use. Entries go on YouTube, which blocks copyrighted music. The full music rule is in Channel 06, The Rules.

CHANNEL 04

Recording like old-time radio

Golden-age radio dramas were performed live around a single microphone, with sound effects played in on cue. That's exactly how the Make-Do category works, and it needs nothing more than a phone. Studio entries can record the same way, or add as much modern production as they like.

Your category: Make-Do or Studio

Every entry goes in one of two categories, so a kitchen-table phone recording is never judged against a home studio. You tell us your category when you submit, and your set-up photo shows us how you made it.

CATEGORY	HOW YOU MADE IT	IN THE RUNNING FOR
Make-Do	Recorded **live in one take** on a phone or tablet, using its own built-in microphone. **No editing.**	The Producer's Choice
Studio	Used any other microphone (plug-in, clip-on, USB, or earbuds or a headset with a mic), **or** edited in any way. Live, one-take recordings are welcome here too.	The Judges' Choice

> **The simple test:** if your voices go into anything other than the phone or tablet's own built-in microphone, or if you edit your recording at all, it's Studio. Make-Do is always one live take, old-time radio style. Studio entries can record live too, or edit as much as they like.

Every entry is also in the running for Audience Choice, plus The Co-Creator Award or The Blank Page Award, depending on how your script was written (see Channel 07).

Make-Do: just a phone, one live take

1. **Set up your studio.** Put one phone on a stand or a stack of books in the middle of a soft, quiet room, or a sheltered spot outdoors. That's your microphone.
2. **Gather round.** Performers stand in a semicircle, a hand-span to an arm's length from the phone.
3. **Work the mic.** Step in close for whispers and private moments. Step back for shouting, or for a character arriving from far away.
4. **Play the sound effect on cue.** Have a helper play the Drama Merchant sound effect from a second device about an arm's length from the recording phone. Mark the cue in your script, e.g. [SOUND EFFECT].
5. **Sign off like a broadcast.** The Drama Merchant introduces every piece on air, so you can launch straight into your story. At the end, add a short sign-off from you or your group: “You've been listening to…” with your title and cast. Theatre groups, this is your moment to tell listeners who you are and how to join you. Keep it under 30 seconds.
6. **Record it live.** Do it in one take, start to finish, just like a real broadcast. No stopping, no editing. Small slips are part of the charm.

Before you start, do a 10-second test with the sound effect and a few lines of your script, then listen back on a speaker. Put every device on aeroplane mode or Do Not Disturb, and disconnect any Bluetooth earbuds or headphones so your phone uses its own microphone. Phones often switch to them automatically, which would make your entry Studio.

> **Golden-age extra: try some foley.** Golden-age crews made effects by hand: crumpled cellophane for a crackling fire, coconut shells for hooves, a tray of gravel for footsteps. Try making one of your own alongside the Drama Merchant effect.

Studio: if you have the tools

- Record together first, then edit in Audacity, GarageBand (Mac, iPhone and iPad) or BandLab (iPhone and Android), placing the sound effect exactly where you want it.
- Add royalty-free music for an opening theme, short stings between scenes, and a closing theme.
- For a vintage touch, try a gentle “old radio” filter (cut some bass and top treble) on the whole piece.
- Check your final mix on a speaker or TV, not just headphones, so it sounds good however people listen.
- Whatever you add, keep the old-time radio heart: clear voices, a sign-off, and the sound effect as a moment the story turns on.

Writing for the ear

- Have characters use each other's names, especially early on.
- Let characters describe what they see, hear and do.
- Keep the cast small, two to four voices, and make each voice distinct.
- Use the sound effect to move the story forward, not just as background.

CHANNEL 05

Submitting

> **Deadline: 6:00pm AEST, Thursday 31 December 2026.** Late entries until 11:59pm AEST (not eligible for awards). Submit through the form on the 24hr Wireless page at thedramamerchant.com.au.
>
> **Something gone wrong?** Email thedramamerchant@hotmail.com before 6pm and we'll do our best to help, or submit as a late entry by 11:59pm.

How to submit

1. Upload your audio file, cast photo and script to OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox or WeTransfer. Co-Creator entries also include their AI draft or prompts.
2. Set the sharing so **anyone with the link can view and download.** Open the link in a private browser window to check it works.
3. Fill in the submission form on the 24hr Wireless page, paste in your link, and tick the box to agree to The Rules (including parent or guardian approval for anyone under 18).
4. Leave the file where it is, unchanged, until the winners are announced on 31 January.

> **About your link:** the time your form is submitted is what counts for the deadline, not when your file was uploaded. Once you've submitted, please don't change, replace or delete the file. We download every entry on the night of 31 December, and that copy is the one that goes to air and is judged. If a link doesn't work, we'll email you, so keep an eye on your inbox that night.

DETAIL	REQUIREMENT
Length	Up to 10 minutes
Format	MP3 (preferred) or WAV
File name	YourName_Title.mp3, e.g. SashaCuha_MerryChristmasMrEtheridge.mp3
Entries	One per person or per group

Include in your submission form

- Title of your piece
- A one or two sentence synopsis
- Full credits: writer, performers and editing (if any), plus music details (title, artist, licence, and a link to the track if it's Creative Commons)
- Your group or theatre company name, if you're entering as one, plus the website or page where listeners can find or join you
- How you used the Drama Merchant sound effect and the theme from your Transmission, and where the sound effect happens in your piece
- Your category, **Make-Do** or **Studio** (see Channel 04), and script type, **Co-Creator** or **Blank Page** (see Channel 07)
- Your script (PDF or Word). **Co-Creator** entries also include the original AI draft or the prompts you used
- Whether anyone in your cast is under 18, and any content flag for mild language or darker themes (see The Rules)
- A short bio (up to 50 words), plus any website or Bandcamp links you'd like shared

- The Instagram and Facebook handles for you and each cast member who'd like to be tagged when your piece airs. Leave anyone out who'd rather not be tagged
- A photo taken during your 24 hours showing everyone who performed, gathered round your set-up: the phone, microphone, wardrobe studio or whatever you recorded with (JPG, landscape if possible). Extra behind-the-scenes photos are welcome too

CHANNEL 06

The Rules

Entry guidelines

By entering, you agree that your piece:

- Was created within the 24-hour window, with everyone in the piece recorded together in the same place, indoors or out.
- Is original, and includes the theme and the Drama Merchant sound effect from your Transmission.
- If entered as Make-Do, was recorded live in one take on a phone or tablet's built-in microphone, with no editing.
- Contains no obscene or indecent content, and no defamatory remarks about any person or organisation.
- Respects other people's privacy and follows all applicable laws.
- Includes no copyrighted material unless it belongs to you or to The Drama Merchant.

Music: Use only music you wrote, music you have permission to use, or royalty-free tracks that allow use on YouTube. Creative Commons music is fine if its licence allows use on YouTube: include a link to the track and its licence so we can credit it properly. Entries are published on YouTube, which automatically scans for copyrighted music, so unlicensed music can get your piece blocked. Include the music details with your submission so we can credit them.

Using AI: You're welcome to use AI tools to help write your concept or script, as long as you say so in your submission and include your original AI draft or prompts. AI-assisted entries are in the running for The Co-Creator Award, and we'll note it in your credits. The voices and performances must be recorded by real people. AI-generated voices aren't eligible.

Content rating: Pieces should suit a general audience. Mild language and darker themes are fine, as long as you flag them in your submission so we can label your piece. No strong swearing, and no graphic violence or sexual content. If you're unsure, ask us before you submit.

Under 18? Young creators are very welcome. If the person registering is under 18, a parent or guardian must register on their behalf. If anyone in your cast is under 18, including in an adult group, their parent or guardian must approve their taking part and publication, including the cast photo.

Late entries: Pieces submitted between 6:00pm and 11:59pm AEST on 31 December are part of the Class of 2026 and go to air in Premiere Week, but aren't eligible for awards. On the voting page they appear below the voting list, under "Also made in 24 hours".

Permission to publish: You keep ownership of your work. By submitting, you give The Drama Merchant permission to publish and share it on YouTube, The Drama Merchant website, The Radioplay Hour and social media, with full credit to you. This includes your cast photo, which we may use on your title card and in social media posts.

> **Agreeing to the rules:** these rules are also on the 24hr Wireless page. When you submit, you'll tick a box on the form to confirm you've read and agree to them, including permission to publish.

The Drama Merchant may decline entries that don't meet these guidelines.

CHANNEL 07

Premiere Week, voting and awards

On New Year's Day we announce the Class of 2026 on the 24hr Wireless page and Instagram: every title and creator who made it. Then every piece that meets the guidelines goes to air during **Premiere Week, Sunday 10 to Saturday 16 January 2027, at 7pm AEST each night**.

Premiere Week is a Radioplay Hour season, and it airs first on The Drama Merchant website. Like the old radio serials, it's broadcast in episodes: a new one every night on the 24hr Wireless page at thedramamerchant.com.au, each about 25 to 45 minutes with three or four entries and The Drama Merchant introducing each piece.

Each episode is put together like a night of old-time radio, with pieces paired for variety and a good listening flow. Entries from young creators (under 18) air together in their own episode where possible. Pieces flagged for mild language or darker themes are labelled.

When voting opens, your piece also goes on our YouTube playlist, *24hr Wireless Project – NYE 2026*, with your credits, synopsis, bio and links, and stays there for people to listen to. Each night's episode is posted on @theradioplayhour on Instagram, tagging that night's creators, and shared on Facebook too.

> **Everyone who finishes** is named in the Class of 2026, goes to air in Premiere Week, gets a digital "I made it in 24 hours" certificate, and joins the season archive on The Drama Merchant website. That's the real prize: you made a radio play in a day. The awards are the bonus.

How voting works

- Once the final Premiere Week episode has aired, every entry goes up together in one playlist on the 24hr Wireless page, with the voting form right beside it, and on our YouTube playlist.
- Share that link with your family and friends so they can listen and vote. Voting runs from Sunday 17 January and closes at 11:59pm AEST on Sunday 24 January.
- One vote per email address. If an email votes more than once, only the first vote counts.
- Only votes on the 24hr Wireless page count. YouTube likes and views aren't part of the award.
- Rally your supporters, but you can't vote for your own piece.

The awards

Five awards. Every entry is in the running for Audience Choice, plus one award for **how you made it** (Make-Do or Studio) and one for **where your script came from** (Co-Creator or Blank Page).

AWARD	CHOSEN BY	OPEN TO	WHAT IT REWARDS
Audience Choice	Listeners	Every entry	The listeners' favourite, by votes on the 24hr Wireless page
The Judges' Choice	Nathan Schulz and two guest judges (announced on the 24hr Wireless page)	Studio category	The best piece of audio theatre made with a microphone or computer editing
The Producer's Choice	Nathan Schulz, The Drama Merchant	Make-Do category	The best piece made live in one take, with just a phone and whatever was at hand
The Co-Creator Award	The guest judges	AI-assisted scripts	The piece where the human touch did the most to bring an AI-assisted script to life

AWARD	CHOSEN BY	OPEN TO	WHAT IT REWARDS
The Blank Page Award	The guest judges	Scripts written from scratch	The best storytelling from a script written from scratch, solo or as a group

The Producer's Choice: in radio's golden age, dramas were performed live around one microphone with whatever was at hand. This award goes to the best piece made the same way: a phone, a wardrobe for a studio, one live take, a second device to play the Drama Merchant sound effect, and any extra sounds made from around the house.

Co-Creator or Blank Page? Tell us how your script was written when you submit. If AI helped write your concept or script, it's a Co-Creator entry. If you wrote it yourselves, it's a Blank Page entry. We trust you to tell us honestly.

The Co-Creator Award: used AI to help write your concept or script? This award is for you. AI can give you a draft, but it can't bring it to life. That takes rewriting, adding, performing and sound. Submit your AI draft alongside your final script, and the judges will reward the piece where the human touch made the biggest difference.

The Blank Page Award: started with nothing but a blank page? This award celebrates scripts written from scratch, solo or as a group: a story that grabs us, dialogue that sounds real, and the sound effect and theme woven in so cleverly we barely notice them. Submit your script with your entry, and let your story do the talking.

How the judges score

The judges give each entry four scores out of 10, for a total out of 40:

- **Required elements:** how well the sound effect and theme are woven in
- **Story:** does it grab us and land its ending?
- **Performance:** voices and character
- **Sound and atmosphere:** does it create a world for the ear?

The winners

Winners are announced on Sunday 31 January 2027, on the 24hr Wireless page and @theradioplayhour.

- Every winner airs in a special winners' episode on The Radioplay Hour, which stays on the main feed for good, and is featured on The Drama Merchant homepage for a month.
- Audience Choice and The Judges' Choice winners also get the chance to create a new Readers Theatre piece or radio play for a future episode of The Radioplay Hour, produced and aired by The Drama Merchant. If you're outside the Gold Coast, we'll work together over Zoom.
- If one piece wins both Audience Choice and The Judges' Choice, the second opportunity goes to the judges' runner-up, so two creators always get the chance.

CHANNEL 08

Your get-ready checklist

- ☐ Registered and paid between Tuesday 1 December and 11:59pm AEST, Tuesday 29 December
- ☐ Category chosen: Make-Do (one live take on a phone or tablet) or Studio
- ☐ Recording app or software installed and tested
- ☐ A quiet place to record booked for the day, indoors or out, with room for your whole cast (and a cast photo)
- ☐ Cast or group confirmed to record together in one place, with one person as group contact
- ☐ Parent or guardian approval sorted for any cast member under 18
- ☐ A second device ready to play the sound effect (if you're recording on a phone)
- ☐ A speaker handy to listen back on
- ☐ Royalty-free or Creative Commons music picked, with licence details and links saved, if you're using music
- ☐ Using AI for your script? A plan to save your AI draft or prompts so you can submit them
- ☐ Theatre group? Your sign-off ready: who you are and how listeners can join you
- ☐ Alarm set for 6:00pm AEST, Wednesday 30 December
- ☐ Alarm set for 5:00pm AEST on Thursday 31 December to start exporting and uploading
- ☐ Cloud storage sorted (OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox or WeTransfer) and you know how to share a link
- ☐ The Rules read, so you're ready to tick the box when you submit
- ☐ Premiere Week in your diary: 7:00pm AEST nightly, Sunday 10 to Saturday 16 January, at thedramamerchant.com.au
- ☐ Voting reminder for your family and friends: Sunday 17 to Sunday 24 January

Share the journey:

On the day: post your behind-the-scenes photos and stories as an Instagram Collab with **@thedramamerchant** (or tag us) and use **#24HWP**. When your piece is done, add **#MadeItIn24**. We'll share what we can, and the extra behind-the-scenes photos you send with your submission may appear on The Drama Merchant too.

When it airs: share your episode as a Collab with **@theradioplayhour** (or tag us) and use **#24HWP**. @theradioplayhour is the home of Premiere Week and the winners.

Questions? Email **thedramamerchant@hotmail.com** or message @thedramamerchant on Instagram or Facebook.

Stay tuned. We'll see you on the air.

Theatre. Just not as you know it.