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Star Wars: The Original Radio Drama



Synopsis

When this series was first broadcast on National Public Radio in 1981, it generated the largest response in the network's history: 50,000 letters and phone calls in a single week, an audience of 750,000 per episode, and a subsequent 40-percent jump in NPR listenership. This landmark production, perhaps the most ambitious radio project ever attempted, began when Star Wars creator George Lucas donated the story rights to an NPR affiliate. Writer Brian Daley adapted the film's highly visual script to the special demands and unique possibilities of radio, creating a more richly textured tale with greater emphasis on character development. Director John Madden guided a splendid cast—including Mark Hamill and Anthony Daniels, reprising their film roles as Luke Skywalker and the persnickety robot See Threepio—through an intense 10-day dialogue recording session. Then came months of painstaking work for virtuoso sound engineer Tom Voegeli, whose brilliant blending of the actors' voices, the music, and hundreds of sound effects takes this intergalactic adventure into a realm of imagination that is beyond the reach of cinema.

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Customer Reviews

At first, the idea seems bizarre, even ridiculous. Star Wars, a movie best known for its vistas of alien worlds and epic battles, as a 13 part radio drama? No way would it work, right? Well, unless you have the cold heart of a Sith, Star Wars did indeed translate well from the silver screen to radio, thank you very much. Yes, Star Wars' visual effects are a big part of the magic of the saga, but the heart and soul of George Lucas' galaxy far, far away are the characters and the storyline. And while the movie is satisfying on its own, the radio dramatization written by the late Brian Daley takes us

beyond the movie....beyond the screenplay...and even beyond the novelization. By expanding the movie's story beyond its two hour running time, the Radio Drama allows us to catch glimpses of Luke Skywalker's life BEFORE the movie. It tells us how Princess Leia acquired the Death Star plans....and what, exactly, happened to her during her interrogation aboard the Empire's battle station...(it is an interesting scene, but not for the squeamish, by the way). In short, by expanding the story to nearly seven hours, characters we loved on screen acquire depth only equaled by novelizations. The Radio Drama makes extensive use of material written (and in some cases filmed) for A New Hope's silver screen version but cut for editorial or technical reasons. Also, Ben Burtt's sound effects, John Williams' score, and the acting of Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker) and Anthony Daniels (See Threepio) give the whole project its "true" Star Wars cachet.

Like most other people ordering this item, I have seen Star Wars more times than I can count. Much to my pleasant surprise, I found the radio series far more interesting than the movie itself - my wife noted that it was as if we were hearing the story for the first time. While part one did start off a little slow, the "back story" did prove useful and helpful. I am amazed at how much of the movie this series "explains": why, during the initial TIE fighter battle, do Han and Luke put on those headsets? Why does ObiWan feel so comfortable with choosing Han Solo? Why does the Rebel Alliance trust a young boy like Luke to fight against the death star? What is Han loading into his ship as he leaves the rebel base? Maybe you never cared about these questions -- I don't think I ever did, either, but after listening to the series, I feel like I've had a back-stage pass. I should note that our children (aged 10, 8, and 6) all loved the story on a recent road trip, and were sad that it ended. The scene with Darth interrogating Leia was a bit difficult, but that soon passed, as well. Can't recommend this one enough!

I have several copies of the NPR StarWars trilogy on CD-ROM. I listen to them on the road and love the continual discovery of the depth of the characters, the use of sound effects, the skill of the actors in portraying everything from stealth to hard work to pain to love. I do have a warning to early collectors of these CDs. The original limited edition of the trilogy had wonderful interviews of the cast and the alternate scenes that were recorded. But HighBridge did not use good CDs. The CD label graphics merged with the color laser technology that created the disk content, wiping out any audio on the CDs. My now useless set is numbered in the 9000s. HighBridge has the masters but declines to reissue to those whose numbered copies were produced on low quality CDs. So if you want to purchase a numbered copy with interviews, rather than the current copies, be warned.

I listened to this originally when it aired on public radio back in the '70's because I loved the movie so much. We didn't have VCR's back then. *C* So it was fantastic to relive the movie experience and the enhancements they made for radio. I will be forever grateful to George Lucas for allowing them to do this and for the great cast. Mark Hamill and Anthony Daniels were gracious enough to do their movie roles and the other cast members did an awesome job.

I recently wrote a review for the Return of the Jedi adaption on NPR which I gave a mere three stars. I cited poor directing, acting and lack of added material. These complaints cannot be levelled against this, the first of the NPR dramatisations. The acting is spot on, with Perry King providing a rougher version of Solo that goes over well, as opposed to the next two adaptions where it begins to grate. Mark Hamill and Anthony Daniels are naturally perfect at the characters that defined them for a decade and more after the original trilogy finished. Bernard Behrens does a surprisingly good Ben Kenobi, and Brock Peters likewise with Vader. They are not Alec Guinness and James Earl Jones, but they're good enough not to cause problems. The direction is great, and I never found myself noticing the obvious radio 'cues' which tell the listener what is happening. The music and sound effects are good and the pacing is not rushed, unlike ROTJ. And as for added material? Deducting front and end credits gives us roughly five and a half hours, nearly triple the length of the film. The vast wealth of extra material is great and never seems out of place. In all I would recommend this to anyone with an interest in the Star Wars original trilogy.

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