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## Narrative as an Element of Podcast Production: The Case Study of *Nezhasínaj!*

### Abstract

The podcast has discovered its own listeners over the past few years and has naturally integrated itself into their daily lives. Its remarkable growth is also resonating in professional and scholarly circles, where attempts are being made to define it and integrate it into mass media theories. The diverse range of genres and means of expression offered by the podcast as a medium has (in terms of the means of communication used) overlaps (in terms of the medium) mainly with radio, but also with television production, and in terms of the broader division of genres mainly with journalism and also with news and fiction genres. The common denominator of all the forms of content presentation mentioned above is the frequent presence of a narrative, which makes the media work attractive and, as we will point out in the article, comprehensible. The principle of narrative as a means of communicating their content has been adopted by podcast creators from other media forms, which may result in the fact that on some podcast platforms

a separate category of content division - Stories - is emerging. In the present study, we will highlight how a story can be built in podcast production, and what are the means of building a story in a podcast.

### Key words

Music. Narrative. Podcast. Sound. Story.

### Introduction

Story is a natural part of being human and has served human society for thousands of years. Along with the discovery of language as an effective way of transmitting information, storytelling emerged with the mission "...to transfer information from generation to generation"<sup>1</sup>. Today, society transmits and stores information efficiently, especially at the level of the Internet and other mass media. Stories have become part of mass

media culture; thanks to social and technological developments, we can tell them through writing, speech, still or moving images, as well as through a combination of these and many other forms. "...we cannot deny that the products of the media industries are eye-catching, emotionally engaging, and thus capable of deepening our timeless tendency to develop and constantly reproduce narratives"<sup>2</sup>. On the pillars of narrative, the essence of the film industry of feature films and documentaries, the television industry - TV films, documentaries, reports, even news stories - operates, where the narrative is sought within the confines of the reality of the mediated event. But we also find it in reality shows, for example, where, paradoxically, the story is artificially implemented. Story plays an important role in radio, where it

dominates news reports, it appears in the communication of personal stories of presenters and listeners during streamed broadcasts, and perhaps the greatest power of auditory narrative in radio can be demonstrated in radio plays or dramatized readings. Narrative is an important part of digital games, where it often co-creates the gaming experience. An interesting penetration is radio broadcasting as part of the game world. Radio, as a game mechanic in digital games, can provide crucial information for the development of the story and influence the player's decisions<sup>3</sup>. Today, stories are part of sophisticated marketing strategies, and the well-known phrase - story sells - still holds strong in several variations. Today, stories are not only a big part of culture, but as part of marketing they inherently participate in business, where they increase sales. Stories are thus becoming an increasingly keenly observed subject of research. Between 1970 and 1990, 587 articles were published on the subject "in the journals indexed by Sociological Abstracts"<sup>4</sup>. In the following 20-year interval, 10 times as many were published<sup>5</sup>. In addition to their social significance, stories are part of a kind of personal history of each

person, because through stories we tell our experiences. Finally, stories are even deeper within us, as they are also behind the perception of reality. Through causality<sup>6</sup>, which is the basis of narrative according to K. Mišíková, we decode reality in space-time into a meaningful set of information<sup>7</sup>. According to Turner, we orient ourselves in recognizing individual objects by means of the "little spatial stories" that we associate with the objects. Based on this principle, we can orient ourselves in space-time and anticipate events: "We sit down at the table, we grab a glass in our hand, we drink, a dog comes and jumps into our lap, we bump the table, the glass topples over, the liquid spills out, the glass falls to the ground, it breaks, etc."<sup>8</sup>. The combination of the clumsy dog and the fragile glass creates a new meaning that we can anticipate as a phenomenon - the dog and the glass of water - means the risk of spilling water. Narrativity is thus encoded in us at an elementary level - at the level of receiving information, decoding and encoding information, orienting ourselves in space-time and in the sequence of events. If, then, story is part of our being and our understanding of reality, it is true: "It is quite possible to say that the virtual world of

digital media offers a new existential dimension"<sup>9</sup>. How narrative affects human perception was confirmed by the experiment of F. Heider and M. Simmel with animated film<sup>10</sup>. Their film<sup>11</sup> is entirely visual, lasting one minute and thirty-two seconds, and consists of moving geometric shapes. The experiment showed that people decoded the movement of the geometric objects as a romantic story of two lovers running away from a jealous husband. The narrative has penetrated under the skin of the community and of humanity and is infused ever deeper into us, changing only its forms and the areas affected. Narrative is part of both interpersonal and mass media communication and is thus both in us and around us<sup>12</sup>. The aim of our study is to define what means of story construction are used by creators in the creation of a podcast media product. The wider goal is to define the overlaps between the artistic genres of radio and the podcast as a new media phenomenon. In doing so, we will use the scientific methods of qualitative-quantitative content analysis, then analysis and synthesis,

<sup>1</sup> The Magical Science of Storytelling HD. [online]. [2022-20-09]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj-hdQM3uA>.

<sup>2</sup> RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> See: ŠKRIPCOVÁ, L.: Virtual Media Literacy in Digital Games. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 131-140.

<sup>4</sup> POLETTA, F., CHEN, P. CH. B., GARDNER, B. G., MOTES, A.: The Sociology of Storytelling. In *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2011, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Authors' note: K. Mišíková understands causality as an element allowing "to define relations between two points in space-time".

<sup>7</sup> MIŠÍKOVÁ, K.: *Mysl a příběh ve filmové fikci*. Prague: PBTisk Příbram, 2009, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See: GÁLIK, S.: Virtual Existentialism. Meaning and Subjectivity in Virtual Worlds. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 84-86.

<sup>10</sup> HEIDER, F., SIMMEL, M.: *An Experimental Study of Apparent Behavior*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://www.all-about-psychology.com/fritz-heider.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Heider and Simmel (1944) Animation*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E>.

<sup>12</sup> See also: PRAVDOVÁ, H., HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., PANASENKO, N.: Homo Corporalis as the Communicated Muse and Centrepiece of Commercialized Culture. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 68-81.

as well as comparison. We will conduct the research between August 24, 2022 and September 7, 2022. The case study will be conducted on the podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!*<sup>13</sup>.

### 1 Stories and Auditory Information Channel

Storytelling has been naturally implemented into a new media phenomenon - the podcast. Podcast media products, like films or radio works, teeter on the spectrum of fiction and non-fiction. In both cases, story plays a role (analogously, fiction and non-fiction in the film industry work on a basis - feature film and documentary). The Spotify platform, which is the most popular<sup>14</sup> podcast listening platform in the world<sup>15</sup>, has a category called Stories among its 10 categories (genres). It includes podcast products whose structure is more or less subject to narrativity. Spotify publishes regular rankings of the most popular podcasts in the context of each category. For the reporting period, the vast majority of the most popular podcasts in the Slovak space categorised as story-driven were based on moderated

interviews where the story played a minor role. Over the entire period under review, there were only 5 podcast channels among the top 20 most listened to podcasts in the Stories category whose episodes were conceived exclusively in the form of a dramatized story and without moderation elements. These were, for example, personal stories of the creators, stories of their friends or listeners, which were humorously fabricated by podcasters Petra Polnišová and Evelyn in the podcast channel *jauuu*, PS: *to bolelo*. The media products of the podcast channel *Kuriéris*, where the creators discuss stories from the everyday working life of couriers, are built on the same principle from this point of view. In the creation of some podcasts, such as in the case of the *Vražedné Psyché* channel, the creators used staged passages to illustrate the crimes analysed, markingly(?) helping to create a listening experience and varying the moderated conversation between the two creators of the podcast channel. Although the stories handled by *Nezhasínaj!* are based on real events, they contain many supernatural phenomena and characters that give the stories the character of a myth. The creators also state that they embellished the staged events with authorial inputs, thus creating a fictional work<sup>16</sup>. The essence of the channel

*Nezhasínaj!* is to tell documented stories from history in the form of a dramatised reading supplemented by elements of a radio play. The episodes are comprehensively staged and we enter into the story without additional and rationalizing commentaries, unlike in the case of the channel *Vražedné Psyché*. This "intense storytelling" is why we chose the podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!* as the object of our research.

The podcast is a kind of alternation of radio broadcasting, and its entry into the media market is related to the development of technology available to the ordinary consumer. Audio on demand has developed from radio, video on demand from classical television and e-books from classical books<sup>17</sup>. Currently, the podcast is still a new media phenomenon and as such, unlike related media, it has relatively little theoretical grasp. At the time of writing, the Spotify platform has sorted its podcast content into the categories of *Stories, Education, Music, Healthy Lifestyle, Business & Technology, Arts & Entertainment, Sports & Leisure, Comedy, News & Politics, Video Games*<sup>18</sup>. As mentioned above, we see narratives as an integral part of media production, and therefore defining

<sup>17</sup> See also: PAVELEKOVÁ, J., ČÁBYOVÁ, L., HRUŠKOVÁ, A.: Reading Behaviour in the Digital Age: Impact of Covid-19 on Consumer Behaviour. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2021, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 25-41.

<sup>18</sup> Authors' note: The last day we record the aforementioned categorization is 13th October 2022. The podcast is categorized differently on Spotify today.

<sup>13</sup> Authors' note: English translation of "Nezhasínaj!" is "Don't turn off the lights!"

<sup>14</sup> Authors' note: There are several statistics from a number of sources on the internet that show Spotify in the top ranks for a long time, often either attacking the top of the user popularity rankings or being right at the top of those rankings. That's why we decided to choose the Spotify platform.

<sup>15</sup> *Most Popular Podcast 2022*. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://statisticsanddata.org/data/most-popular-podcast>>.

<sup>16</sup> #2 ŠPECIÁL Podcast o podcaste *Nezhasínaj!* [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1e8qS78p5k&list=PL2ui\\_nirbaytQ7J73\\_DQ8ZqBm9-De7HO3&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1e8qS78p5k&list=PL2ui_nirbaytQ7J73_DQ8ZqBm9-De7HO3&index=6)>.

narrative in podcasts is key to the theoretical grasp of podcasting. To define narrative in the podcast series *Nezhasínaj!* we set two basic research questions as our starting point. The general answer to this is the topic of the podcast episode itself. The latter characterizes the basic story and space-time, and thus directly answers the other questions - when and where the story takes place. We obtained the themes of each episode by listening to all the episodes and reading their short descriptions on Spotify. Aristotle argues that "...it is not enough to know what is to be said, but it is also necessary to know how it is to be said..."<sup>19</sup>, therefore, the second question is: how did the creators create the story? In order to answer this question, we have established a number of criteria against which we will evaluate the works. We have divided the criteria into content and form. In the context of the form of the media work, we examined, whether direct speech was used in the podcast, the narrator, whether the stories began in medias res, whether the sequence of events in the story worked chronologically, or whether retrospect was used. We also evaluated the narrator's delivery and the way he staged and dramatized the plot with his voice. The formal aspect is also related to the technical dimension of the work. Therefore, we investigated whether the colour of the voice and the sound

design connected to it had an impact on the dramatic appearance of the work. On the content criteria tied to the second research question: a fundamental characteristic of podcasts is that they (with the exception of vodcasts/videocasts) take place exclusively on the plane of the auditory information channel. As we demonstrate in more detail in one of our articles<sup>20</sup>, the auditory information channel offers 5 basic categories into which we can classify different storytelling devices. These categories are a) *spoken word*, b) *music*, c) *foleys*, d) *ambiences*, and e) *special effects*. Over time, in our exploration of the world of media sound, we have arrived at another category, which is the absence of sound - f) *silence*. The means of expression closely determine the dramaturgical procedures by which a story can be told. In this regard, we have set the following parameters: the creative use of foleys, ambiences and special effects, their loudness in the mixing plan, the use of silence and their narrative value. Separately, we noted the work with music - how it complements the auditory identity, or what information it conveys to the percipient.

### 2 Themes and *Nezhasínaj!*

On the Spotify platform, the podcast *Nezhasínaj!* is categorized under

<sup>20</sup> See: KOLENČÍK, P., HUDÍKOVÁ, Z.: Auditive Space as an Information Channel. In HOSSOVÁ PROSTINÁKOVÁ, M., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., SOLÍK, M. (eds.): *Megatrends and Media. Home Officetainment*. Trnava : Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM v Trnave, 2021, pp. 118-130.

<sup>19</sup> ARISTOTELES: *Rétorika - Poetika*. Prague : Petr Rezek, 1999, p. 187.

Stories. In terms of the broader genre, it can be considered an anthology, as each episode consists of a self-contained, non-sequential story. In terms of auditory genres, it can be characterized as a dramatized reading, as all characters are presented by a single reading actor who stylizes himself into each character. The foley usage and the use of sound ambiances distinguish it from other podcast productions in Slovakia and make it original and interesting. In terms of classical literary genres, the podcast channel mainly contains elements of historical horror. Individual episodes are conceived on the basis of various legends from the near or distant past (approximately 25-700 years ago) and contain various "spooky" elements. Interestingly, the individual stories are supported by direct testimonies or accounts - not only of natural phenomena and events, but also of those we consider supernatural. The scriptwriters working on the podcast further dramatize these stories, that is, transform the knowledge gained into coherent and entertaining auditory works. The main common denominator and the means with a centripetal dramaturgical effect, holding the listener's attention, is the common element of the episodes - each episode-topic is meant to sound spooky. This is to be facilitated by the very "real" basis of the processed stories enriched with the supernatural and mysterious. Below are the titles of the episodes in question, along with the short loglines we have registered as of 27 July 2022:

**Table 1: Titles of individual episodes of the podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!***

#Trailer: <i>Nezhasínaj!</i>	A 40 second trailer which is a variation of the intro text. The trailer announces 10 “tales of terror”, although the podcast has 15 of them so far + 2 special episodes.
#1 Vlkolak z Bedburgu	The story of the inhabitants of the German town of Bedburg in 1589 who were murdered by a werewolf.
#2 Prešporskí okultisti	A big black dog haunts the inhabitants of Pressburg in 1837 and decides whether they are honest enough to let them live.
#3 Kikimora	The story of a girl possessed by the devil, which inspired the film <i>The Exorcist</i> . It begins in Aschaffenburg, Germany in 1952.
#4 Vyháňač diabla	The story of a girl possessed by the devil, which inspired the film <i>The Exorcist</i> . It begins in Aschaffenburg, Germany in 1952.
#5 Dlhý Prokop	In 1925, a supernatural forest creature allegedly killed a young woman in the forests around the workers’ colony of Polomec in Czechoslovakia.
#6 Haitská zombie	The story of a woman’s transformation into a zombie monster is set in Haiti and the plot begins in the summer of 1976.
#7 Hora mŕtvych	In 1959, a group of students set out for the Ural Mountains, where a series of obscure events set them up for their lives.
#8 Víla Menička	The story of the fairy and the Cleary couple from Ireland in 1895. Believing that the wife’s body has been stolen by the shifter fairy and entered her, the young woman is tortured and beaten to death by her husband and family
#9 Rasputin	The story of a famous figure in recent history is set in Russia in 1914. Rasputin’s life and death are interwoven with magical mysteries that are partially interpreted in the podcast episode.
#10 Tanečný mor	In 1518, the story of the dancing plague took place in Strasbourg. The plague infected up to about 200 people. The infected inhabitants couldn’t stop dancing until the bones in their bodies broke.
#1 ŠPECIÁL: Podcast o podcaste <i>Nezhasínaj!</i>	A publicistic interview with podcast producer Simona Mičová and podcast dramaturge Diana Kacárová. The guest is an actor who has uploaded stories for the channel <i>Nezhasínaj!</i> (Don’t turn off the lights!) Marek Majeský

#2 ŠPECIÁL: Podcast o podcaste <i>Nezhasínaj!</i>	A publicistic interview with podcast producer Simona Mičová and podcast dramaturge Diana Kacárová. The guest is the writer and screenwriter Katarína Pivarčiová, who participated in the scripts of some episodes.
#11 Červená stodola	The English town of Polstead came to the media’s attention in 1827 when the ghost of a murder victim appeared in the local Red Barn.
#12 Diablove trhlina	In 1612, the encounter of the young man Jonáš Hurtík with hell itself took place in the territory of Bohemia under Houska castle.
#13 Levínska upírka	In 1344, a vampire appeared in Český Levín and frightened the local population.
#14 Ohnivé zjavenie	A priest from Pressburg recorded an event in 1641, when the inhabitants of Austria were haunted by the apparition of a ghost.
#15 Vlkolak z Allarizu	In 1809, a man was born in Galicia who is now known as the ‘Tallow Man’ because he made soap out of his victims. The man was believed to be a werewolf and was the first known mass murderer in Spain <sup>21</sup> .

Source: own processing

The average length of all fifteen “story” episodes is 36 minutes and 38 seconds (the shortest is 29 minutes and 53 seconds, the longest 41 minutes and 34 seconds). The similar length of the stories helps to create a listener stereotype tied to the work on offer. The three non-story episodes have separate durations. The trailer is 40 seconds in length, which matches the length of similar genres. The moderated special episodes, each over an hour in length, in turn provide a fairly deep dive into the creative process of podcast production<sup>22</sup>.

21 *Nezhasínaj!* [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3uyOun-5MugMfoINp5Joe9S>.

22 Authors’ note: #1 ŠPECIÁL: Podcast o podcaste *Nezhasínaj!* - length 1:07:32:00; #2 ŠPECIÁL: Podcast o podcaste *Nezhasínaj!* - length 1:03:58:00.

The podcast structure in the story episodes is very simple and repetitive. Each episode starts with a common intro. Its role is to tune the listener to the ambience characteristic of the podcast *Nezhasínaj!* The unified outro at the end of each episode has the same function. The individual episodes are thus unified. The podcast sounds more professional on this basis, the marking of a series of shows with a common sound at the beginning and end of the show is standard in the professional media world and has been used since the early days of radio broadcasting.

### 3 Narrative Devices and *Nezhasínaj!*

In terms of exploring the narrative, but also in terms of analysing the richness of the storytelling practices, we focused in detail on the “story” episodes of the podcast

channel *Nezhasínaj!* We specifically evaluated narrative practices, which we list above as defined research criteria. In an area of almost 550 minutes (15 episodes), on the one hand, a diverse range of narrative practices can be found, and on the other, again, a unifying structure of their use can be identified. None of the stories begins explicitly in medias res; on the contrary, the narratives unfold gradually and build up tension in the listener. The exceptions are episodes #4 *Vyháňač diabla*, #15 *Vlkolak z Allarizu*, and #6 *Haitská zombie* - these unfold partially retrospectively. Since the podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!* has a genre (also) of criminal dimension and talks about crimes committed against people, we logically encounter themes of trials and executions or other ways in which the authorities dealt with criminals in the course of the episodes. However, the causality of crime first

then punishment can also be portrayed in reverse, and thus spice up the work (such a procedure is quite standard in filmmaking today). Apparently for this reason - to spice up the work - the filmmakers decided to use a retrospective, where the three episodes start as if from the end and then continue with a chronological progression of events. Episode #4 *Vyháňáč diavla* begins with a description of the events of the final trial, at which the parents of the now dead protagonist and the two attending priests were accused of killing the dead protagonist. The story is then told chronologically from the protagonist's childhood, through the devil's intrusion into the protagonist, to her death. Episode #15 *Vlkolak z Allarizu* opens with the final trial of the mass murderer, so within the plot just before the end of the story, and then the plot retrospectively returns to the birth of the protagonist. From there, as in the previous case, the story unfolds chronologically. In the case of episode #6 *Haitská zombie*, the creators first describe the aftermath of the protagonist's "zombie transformation" before the episode unfolds chronologically, leading up to how the transformation came about and what followed it. Within each episode, the main part of spoken word is narrator's bands, but direct speech takes place in plot as well. Majeský always interprets the narrator with respect to the content of the plot, staging the scary passages eerily, the more cheerful passages with lightness and pleasantness in his voice. Many of the descriptions bring horror to the story by, for example, the detailed descriptions of various monsters, people turning into werewolves, and

the various horrific descriptions of the mental experiences of the characters tied to the unfolding events are also frightening. Majeský's interpretation brings a necessary emotion to the text, which helps the audience to experience the events almost authentically, thus creating an artistic experience for the audience as well. Direct speech as a form of expression for the characters is usually written to fit the characters. For example, in episode #15 *Vlkolak z Allarizu*, we can watch the protagonist imaginatively transform into a werewolf. When he "reincarnates" into his murderous alter-ego in this way, he speaks very sternly, suggesting that he has moved away from his "humanity" and become more of an animal. At the same time, we can hear how his narration has become anatomically impeded (as the character now feels like a werewolf, not a human). He says simple sentences, such as "Here I am". Another example of a well-rendered interpretation of direct speech, appropriate to the character's nature, is the character of the curious, superstitious neighbour from episode #3, *Kikimora*. The character uses dialect in direct speech, and also constantly refers to superstition, thus faithfully illustrating the character's nature. "And do you hear what? Do you hear anything? Whistling? Like when you've got mice in your basement?" After answering, the character continues, "Nightmare! A nightmare, a mara, or a sneaking!". Majeský styles himself into the characters in each episode of the podcast channel with great commitment - he mimics the voices of various monsters, men and women, which adds interest and variety to the

stories, and it also helps the listener navigate between the characters in the story. For example, when presenting the character of the aforementioned werewolf, Majeský deployed a higher, raspy voice, which distinguished the character significantly from the other characters. When Majeský styled himself as a child in the first episode, he sat his voice very high, suggesting the subtlety and delicacy of the character. The antagonist's creepy, animal sounds thus sound very contrasting compared to the sounds conveyed by the children's voices, (also) making the antagonist seem dangerous. When Majeský staged the character of the neighbour, her voice sounded old - squeaky. The voice of the young protagonist was in contrast with the neighbour's character, which made it easy for the listener to know who was speaking. Majeský's professional voice acting work is supported by the sound designer's quality editing in all story episodes. Particularly noticeable is the strong equalization, which helped to complete the actor's - the reader's (interpret's) - voice colour, supporting his pleasant deep voice. Also audible is the use of the dynamic range compression process (lowering the volume of loud passages and raising the volume of quiet ones), thanks to which the media product has a high intelligibility of the spoken word even at lower volumes. These and other acts of editing Majeský's voice greatly helped to enhance the aesthetics of the recording. The usage of music and how the creators work with it has both a unifying nature and a centripetal dramaturgical effect. Thanks to - a musical database identical for all

episodes, consisting of several musical units, a unified consistency is created between episodes. Such a procedure is used in the creation of series (both audiovisual and radio) - it makes it easier for the creators to create a certain sensation in the recipient, co-creates the identity of the series and builds a stereotype of perception of the format. In addition, it has another practical consequence - it saves time for the creator (efficiency of dealing with a well-known musical production) and money for the institution for obtaining new music each time, as opposed to the cost of royalties for a repeated motif. Many more musical sections were used in the story episodes compared to the rushes. The foley usage (and the usage of sound ambiances) is rather suggestive. The podcasts examined work with iconic sounds, which the creators use only in places that are strictly necessary. The creators often use foleys and ambiances to help characterise the space-time. To demonstrate the historical city location, the creators use the stamping of horses' hooves on the city's cobblestones, followed by the slow-voiced ambience of the muttering of people passing by (#15 *Vlkolak z Allarizu*). If, on the other hand, they want to demonstrate the absence of people and the freezing cold of the Russian taiga, they use the sound of a howling melusine (#7 *Hora mrtvych*). In episode #12 *Diablova trhlina*, the sound of the forest was used to create the idea of Bohemian forests, which helped the listener to imagine the environment in which the story took place. The calming feeling and aesthetic that the ambience brought was contrasted with the mysterious events and hellish themes that were

later heard throughout the piece. Similarly, this was the case in episode of 5# *Dlhý Prokop*. The ambience of the Bohemian forest created is very harmonizing, with the sounds of forest birds and the gentle foley of branches in the (apparently summer) breeze. The filmmakers took a specific approach to selected passages with erotic themes. In episodes 9# *Rasputin* and #13 *Levínska upírka*, the erotic scenes are enriched with sounds reminiscent of a pornographic film. The gasps and sounds of two bodies colliding are obscene and shocking. In neither case, however, is this a conventional love scene. Stories about Rasputin often contain motifs that suggest a superhumanly capable lover. The episode about the vampire, on the other hand, involves an act of love between a human and a supernatural being. Apparently, this is why the creators chose to illustrate sexual intercourse in such a vulgar way. On the other hand, it is questionable whether the quality of the work would have been diminished if the sex scenes had been made less explicit. Indeed, the gestures also serve to emphasise certain moments. For example, when the name of the murderer is heard in episode #11 *Červená stodola*, we hear a loud church bell, which is apparently meant to evoke the so-called "umieráčik" - the bell announcing the death of someone from the locality. The bell thus evokes themes associated with death, and the listener may begin to suspect that the bearer of the name sounding with the bell will become the murderer. On the other hand, in the same episode, the creators did not let a very important and dramatic moment ring out. The creators used the description to

expose the setting of the barn, which is the supporting motif of the whole episode (since the murder case was in its time publicized precisely through the Red Barn, in which the murderer buried his victim). "Suddenly she sees a sort of red shed in the distance. She walks closer to it. She stops in front of a wooden gate. She recognises them. It's the Red Barn. A place in the woods where young people in love used to meet in secret. Before she returns, she manages to touch it to open it. The wind leans against them and breaks them open (a foley that is supposed to represent the breaking open of the door). It is dark inside. And in that blackness someone is standing". The gradually building tension is meant to help escalate the added bustle of the door breaking open. However, the bustle adds little to the drama as it is very inappropriately chosen. The foley that has been used consists of a short dull thud against the wood. The creators could have rather used the creaking of unlubricated hinges combined with the foley of the creaking of cloth in the old door, which is heard when the door is smashed open, which would have added to the authenticity. In the last published episode, there is an interesting rule that every passage set indoors contains the sound of a fire in the 3rd sound plan (i.e. quieter than the music and quieter than the spoken word) to evoke a cosy atmosphere. The latter sounded toxic and perverse in the context of the themes of a mass murderer. At the same time, the aforementioned ambience of a crackling fire helped the listener to be constantly oriented as to where the action was taking place. Special effects, such as sounds representing

various extreme psychic states, sounds of fire spewing from the mouths of hellish creatures, or sounds of other unreal creatures, despite the fact that this is a horror genre where various monsters and mysterious phenomena are present, in the podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!* they are heard only once, in episode #3 of Kikimora. A college student finds herself in sleep paralysis. In order to express the mental state of a character in a way other than description, the creators use a sonic drone<sup>23</sup> (a longer sound motif that is aesthetically close to music, but has a less organized structure and often does not even use musical instruments to create it). The sonic drone consists of ringing sounds of higher frequencies and a modulated tone. In the context of describing the horrific events unfolding at the time the drone is used to represent, the drone sounds too positive and fairy-tale-like, and not scary and horrific enough. Everything else mysterious in the stories is staged only in the voice of the narrator, Majeský.

### Conclusion

The podcast channel *Nezhasínaj!* is a work of art based on a staged reading of stories, which is enriched by a rather dense musical and, conversely, rather sparse foley usage. The very dense soundtrack consists of musical units from the (apparently) assembled music bank of the creators. For the listener, it illustrates the experience of the characters, supports the listener

in empathizing with the characters and completes the auditory identity of the media product. Foleys and ambiences help to tell the story. They give the listener full information and, together with the music, influence the aesthetics of the artwork. Professional mixing gives hierarchy to the information communicated, determines its importance and also what the recipient should focus on. In the foreground is the constant spoken word, which continuously pulls the plot from beginning to end. The supporting element is the voice of the actor Marek Majeský, who is the sole and identifying voice of the podcast (apart from the first part of the informative intro). He has faithfully staged the characters and staged himself into the various personas of the characters featured in the stories. His voice is enhanced by the tasteful input of the sound designer, which makes the voice sound full, clear and very aesthetically pleasing. The development of the story was built mainly on the narrator's text, indirect speech and descriptions. To a lesser extent, there was some use of direct speech to highlight the presence of the characters in the story. With three exceptions, the stories flowed entirely chronologically. Thematically, the podcast series *Nezhasínaj!* is very diverse. It's anchored by genre – it's a classic genre – historical, mystery horror. Although the text is literary in nature, the foley and ambient component is more restrained, unlike classically treated radio works. The podcast channel is quite popular with listeners. It seems to have won the latter by the craft quality, good concept and professionalism of the whole media work. If we compare it with radio plays and dramatised readings, to which it bears a striking resemblance, we can see that it bears several characteristics of these genres.

As in dramatised reading, the whole story is read by a single professional who stylizes his speech into individual characters. What it has in common with the radio play is the use of foleys, special effects and ambiences. Compared to the radio play, however, the foleys and ambience in *Nezhasínaj!* are used rather sparingly. The analogy between the podcast and radio can be felt in certain overlaps between these auditory media forms. Compared to other radio genres, the art genres of radio contain the most narrativity; creators can afford to fabricate and make virtually unlimited use of foleys and ambiences to illustrate the reality presented in the story. As a still young form, the podcast does not have completely established genres<sup>24</sup>, but among the products on the Spotify platform in the Stories category, it was possible to find a group of podcast products that work differently with story than the other media products in this group. Similar to the fiction genres of radio, they use a certain degree of storytelling and work with a wide range of creative means of expression. For example, there are retrospectives, sounds from the whole spectrum of sound categories, from foleys, through ambiences, special effects, and of course music and spoken word. They use direct speech, the figure of the narrator, the staging and dramatization of the text by the reader, or the stylization of the text into characters to present the story. Benefiting from copying the means of expression of other media forms, especially radio, the podcast can provide a wide range of entertainment. For the generation that

grows up and comes of age with it, it can be an attractive format. For media companies, it can be an interesting media format with a substantial share of the media market, thanks to the audience attention it attracts over the years.

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<sup>23</sup> Drone Music Guide: A Brief History of Drone in Music. [online]. [2022-10-10]. Available at: <<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/drone-music-guide>>.

<sup>24</sup> Authors' note: The permanence of genre categorization is evidenced by the change in Spotify's categorization of podcast content, which occurred while working on this article.