



R Audio Romance

by Diana Tixier Herald

Romance is the most popular genre in print—

responsible for over 55% of all mass-market paperback book sales, according to the Romance Writers of America. As in print so it is in audio: Romance novels are undeniably popular with listeners.

Many readers consider any story with a strong love emphasis as a “romance” even if it sometimes ends tragically, as in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, romance aficionados believe that to be part of the genre, a tale must not only focus on the romantic relationship, it must have a happily-ever-after resolution.

So, which romances are listeners avid for these days? And if you are new to romance, how do you find your way around this increasingly complex genre?

One way of categorizing romances is by their settings. Novels in the contemporary category—what most people mean when they say “romance”—are set in the present and usually take place in locales familiar to English-speaking readers—often in the United States and Great Britain—or in locations visited by American or British characters. Many popular numbered series—Zebra Bouquet, Harlequin Romance, and Silhouette Romance—are contemporary, but it is the single-title romance with a contemporary setting that most often makes it into audio format.

Contemporary tales typically focus on one couple, but some feature two or three couples who are related through blood or friendship. Often at least one of the main characters is recovering from some kind of tragedy or loss. The Glitz & Glamour subcategory features the rich or famous, and loving description is often bestowed on apparel, architecture, and furnishings.

Historical romances, obviously, take place in the past. England's Regency period, first popularized in novels by Georgette Heyer, lasted only 9 years (1811-1820), yet it has proven to have enduring allure for romance fans. Until recently, Regency romances could be depended on to be of the "sweet" or innocent type, but now they often include erotically charged lovemaking scenes. The Scottish trend really took off with the popularity of movies such as *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart* in the 1990s. Fierce Scottish warriors have now become a

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fairly recent subgenre is Americana, with many stories set in the American heartland during the 1920s and 1930s against the background of Prohibition and the Great Depression.

Genre blending has made a huge contribution to the success of romance, as each hybrid brings new readers and listeners. Romantic suspense, in which the hero and heroine find love and romance and are exposed to heart-thumping danger along the way, is the fastest growing subgenre. (Many authors who started off writing branded series novels, such as Harlequin and Silhouette, made their move to bestsellerdom when they switched to romantic suspense. Tami Hoag and

staple in historical romance, and listeners seem to enjoy the delightful Scots brogues often used by narrators in this type of story. The American past is also a popular setting. Western romances have rugged heroes and female heroines who also exhibit independence and resourcefulness. A

Beyond the Bodice Ripper

Here are the subgenres most prevalent in audio romance today— with quick takes on some of the most popular titles.

Glitz & Glamour

Suzanne Brockman
HEARTTHROB

Read by Ralph Lowenstein
Film producer Kate O'Laughlin shepherds former superstar Jericho Beaumont, who had once been voted "The Sexiest Man Alive," through a comeback role in O'Laughlin's movie following years of the actor's alcoholism and drug addiction.

Contemporary

Jennifer Crusie
FAST WOMEN

Read by Sandra Burr
Nell Dysart takes a job as office manager for private investigator Gabe McKenna and finds more than she bargained for.

FAKING IT

Read by Aasne Vigesaa
An art forger and an art thief meet in a closet.

Barbara Delinsky
HEART OF THE NIGHT

Read by Sandra Burr
Twins find love while looking for their kidnapped friend.

Elizabeth Lowell
THIS TIME LOVE

Read by Laural Merlington
Gabe, a globe-trotting journalist, and Joy, a cave expert, are reunited seven years after a first encounter that resulted in the birth of a child he wasn't told about.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips
THIS HEART OF MINE

Read by Jennifer Van Dyck
Can an independent children's book author and a pro quarterback find love together?

BREATHING ROOM

Read by Kate Fleming
A disgraced self-help maven and a Hollywood bad boy find love in Tuscany when he attempts to dislodge her from his farmhouse.

Luanne Rice
DREAM COUNTRY

Read by Laural Merlington
When 6-year-old Sage Tucker runs away from her mother in Connecticut to hitchhike to her father in Wyoming, she brings her parents (who had a perfect marriage until Sage's twin brother disappeared at age 3) face to face.

Regency England

Catherine Coulter
THE WYNDHAM LEGACY

Read by Maggie McClellan
Josephina Cochran becomes a legitimate heiress after the death of her father, the Earl of Chase, but she is required to marry her antagonistic cousin, Marcus Wyndham, who has inherited the title.

Mary Jo Putney
THE BARTERED BRIDE

Read by Michael Page
An American sea captain is shocked to find an Englishwoman being auctioned off in a Malaysian slave market. He risks his life to save her and takes her back to London.

Amanda Quick
LATE FOR THE WEDDING

Read by Jennifer Van Dyck
Read by Josephine Bailey
In this spicy Regency romp, private investigators Lavinia Lake and Tobias March are involved in the investigation of a serial killer who leaves a memento mori ring at the scenes of his crimes.

WICKED WIDOW

Read by Katherine Kellgren
Read by Barbara Rosenblatt
A widow under suspicion for murder, a secret book of a secret society, and a businessman with secrets of his own are brought together in the search for a ghost.

Historic Scotland

Diana Gabaldon
OUTLANDER

Read by Geraldine James
Read by Davina Porter
Claire Randall, a WWII nurse, is swept back to eighteenth-century Scotland, where she finds herself ensnared in the war between the Scots and the English and falls in love with Jamie Fraser. This now classic Romance novel made the Scottish romance a favorite of fans.

Julie Garwood
THE WEDDING

Read by Alison Fraser
On her journey through twelfth-century Scotland to an arranged marriage, Lady Brenna is abducted by a band of warriors and married to their laird, Connor MacAlister, and, of course, falls in love.

Americana

Dorothy Garlock
MOTHER ROAD

Read by Lewis Grenville
In Oklahoma in 1932, a handsome stranger, H.L. Yates, stops by a service station just in time to see the owner, Andy Connors, bitten by a rabid skunk. He decides to take over while Andy is hospitalized and falls hard for Andy's sister-in-law Leona, who has the reputation of a fallen woman in the small-minded community.

Karen Robards have successfully made the jump.) Science fiction romances have futuristic settings, and fantasy romances feature magic and the paranormal. Vampires and werewolves have long been popular, but the current trend is toward characters who possess extraordinary psychic abilities—they see the future or the past, move things with their minds. The inspirational romance category is dominated by Christian tales in which two people not only find true love for each other but also the love of God. Sometimes you'll find as many as three genres combined, as in the futuristic Eve Dallas "In Death" series by J.D. Robb (aka Nora Roberts), which marries romance with science fiction and the police procedural.

Undoubtedly, a major satisfaction in listening to romance novels is hearing a skilled narrator heighten the sexy drama, as a recent *AudioFile* review noted of George Guidall's narration of Meagan McKinney's *Still of the Night*: "He outdoes himself during the steamy sex scenes, evoking images of tangled legs and sheets." Other narrators who are popular with romance fans include Sandra Burr, who has read dozens of titles by top

romance authors, and Jill Tanner, narrator of Marion Chesney's *The Deception* and Julia Garwood's *The Secret*, among others. Another pleasure for romance fans is that beloved stories that have gone out of print are sometimes brought back to life through audio: Rosalind Laker's Warwyck series, set in the nineteenth century, has been released on audio, as have Georgette Heyer's *A Civil Contract* and Marion Chesney's Regency romance series *Daughters of Mannerling*.

Audio romances succeed because they involve listeners and leave them feeling good. When you put away that last cassette or disc, you know all will be well with the characters you have come to know and love.

Diana Tixier Herald is the author of Teen Genreflecting, now in its second edition; Genreflecting, in its fifth; and Fluent in Fantasy, and the co-author of Strictly Science Fiction. She has spent the last year and a half camping on the edge of a canyon at an altitude of 7,000 ft. while building a house made out of tires, bottles, cans, and earth.

Western

Jude Deveraux MOUNTAIN LAUREL

Read by Judith Light
Maddie Worth, traveling incognito as La Reina, The Singing Duchess, is really a courier attempting to free her kidnapped sister, but Captain Ring Montgomery, who is assigned to guide her into the Colorado gold camps, is working to scare her off.

Julie Garwood PRINCE CHARMING

Read by Deborah Hall
Recently jilted, Lady Taylor Stapleton follows through with an arranged marriage to a Montana rancher, which was set up by her late grandmother in order to save her fortune and her niece's virtue.

Johanna Lindsey A MAN TO CALL MY OWN

Read by Laural Merlington
In the 1870s, identical twins who are nothing alike are sent west to live with their aunt, a widowed rancher; under the provisions of their father's will, they must get married with the aunt's blessing in order to claim their inheritance.

Romantic Suspense

Elizabeth Lowell MIDNIGHT IN RUBY BAYOU

Read by Laural Merlington
Jewelry designer Faith Donovan has created an exquisite ruby necklace as a wedding gift, but her family, fearful that she and the rubies are in danger, assigns Owen Walker to guard her against mobsters, the Russian Mafia, and maybe even the FBI.

Linda Lael Miller THE LAST CHANCE CAFÉ

Read by Nance Williamson
Fleeing killers with her two young children, Hallie O'Rourke finds shelter in a Nevada café, where she meets Chance Qualtrain, who offers her a place to stay on his ranch.

Luanne Rice THE SECRET HOUR

Read by Linda Emond
Read by Barrett Whitener
Kate Harris, on a quest for her missing sister, Willa, turns up on the doorstep of widowed attorney John O'Rourke, who is defending a serial killer who could be connected to Willa's disappearance. Kate falls in love with him and his children.

Nora Roberts HOMEPORT

Read by Erika Leigh
Art authenticator Miranda Jones and sexy art thief Ryan Boldari are brought together by fake bronzes as someone tries to kill Miranda and her reputation.

TRUE BETRAYALS

Read by Rose Ann Shansky
Kelsey Byden is drawn into the world of thoroughbred racing when she hears from her mother, presumed dead for many years. At her mother's horse farm, she finds love with the gambling man next door and deals with murder, sabotage, and betrayals.

Inspirational Romance

Janette Oke A GOWN OF SPANISH LACE

Read by Aimee Lilly
Read by Emily Welsh
Teenaged teacher Ariana Benson is kidnapped and held for ransom until the outlaw boss's son, Laramie Lawrence, releases her and they trek to Montana.

Francine Rivers REDEEMING LOVE

Read by Kate Forbes
In a retelling of the Bible story of Hosea set in the California Gold Rush of 1850, virtuous farmer Michael Hosea is told by God to marry Angel, who had been sold into a life of prostitution.

Fantasy/ Paranormal

Jude Deveraux WILD ORCHIDS

Read by John Dossett, Lauren Mufson
Read by Alan Nebelthau, Kate Skinner
Storyteller Jackie Maxwell tells widowed mystery writer Ford Newcombe a fascinating tale of a woman in Cole Creek, North Carolina, who fell in love with the devil and was stoned to death. When the two go to Cole Creek to find out more, Jackie starts having frightening premonitions.

Jayne Ann Krentz LIGHT IN SHADOW

Read by Joyce Bean
Interior designer Zoe Luce is living under an assumed identity but still possesses psychic abilities that lead her to investigate a possible murder—and into the arms of private investigator Ethan Truax.