

# LETTERS OF THE LAW

KENNY SMITH TURNS BACK THE CLOCK OVER  
2,000 YEARS FOR A BIG FINISH ORIGINAL...

**B**IG FINISH has begun producing more and more original drama over the last few years, away from its ranges of licensed products. And it's not taken long for them to become critical successes as 2017 release, **Cicero**, has already proved when it was nominated for Best Audio Drama at the 2018 Audies.

Written by David Llewellyn, produced and directed by Scott Handcock, and starring **Dirk Gently's** Samuel Barnett, the pilot episode, *Though Scoundrels are Discovered*, was released last year, and now a further five episodes

are following hot on its heels.

The series is set in Rome in 80BC, when an age of bloody civil war and dictatorship is at an end. Ambitious young lawyer, Marcus Tullius Cicero, is beginning to make a name for himself, and he must find a way to balance family and friendship with his unwavering commitment to justice.

Scott reveals: "I was thrilled to get an opportunity to explore **Cicero** further. As I'm sure I've said before, I studied his career years ago and became fascinated by him, so it was already an

ambition fulfilled to dramatise the Sextus Roscius case, and to know it went down as well as it did was an additional thrill.

"It was only released last February, but it was at the Gallifrey One convention around that time that Jason Haigh-Ellery reviewed the reception to it and decided on the spot we'd do five more. And that was so exciting – not just for me but for David Llewellyn, who scripted it so brilliantly, and of course Sam and George who played the Cicero brother themselves. Ideas instantly started forming for where we could take it!

"David Llewellyn and I had been thinking of **Cicero** being an audio drama idea for a very long time, so I couldn't turn to anyone other than him to tackle the series, and thankfully he said yes! The Trial of Sextus Roscius was a pivotal – but quite unique – case in Cicero's life, and we both agreed we didn't want the series to just become a procedural crime drama set in ancient Rome.

"The drama is about Cicero and, yes, whilst he was a brilliant lawyer and orator, this is ultimately the story about his life. Now, with five more episodes to play with, we get to explore that

He tells *Vortex*: "I was very pleasantly surprised when I heard the pilot of **Cicero** had gone on to a series. I was hoping it would. I loved the pilot and knew that we had only scratched the surface in

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terms of the wealth of material out there about Cicero.

"He's a complex man who isn't always likeable and that's a lot of

fun to play. Also I wanted to see more of his relationship with his brother Quintus because they make such a fine double-act.

"What appeals to me about Cicero is that we have so much source material for not only his

public and political life, but also the private, personal side of him through his writing. He reveals who he is in all his letters and



Above (l-r): Laura Riseborough, Samuel Barnett and Wilf Scolding

life a little further. So it's not just law and politics, but culture and philosophy and the relationships Cicero shares with people. We also delve into Quintus's character more this time round, as well as meeting the brothers' parents, and Cicero's first wife, Terentia. It's great to flesh out the world and show new sides to the characters."

**S**AMUEL BARNETT was delighted to get back into studio to return as the titular character of the series.



Above (l-r): Paul Clayton and Ben Arogundade



Above (l-r): Richard Earl and Sarah Douglas

speeches and it's fascinating to dramatise that, to bring him to life.

"Cicero is so engrained in our lives today in ways that we don't even realise, and yet he's probably not among the first people who spring to mind when we think of famous historical figures. His influence reaches across millennia. I'm drawn to what makes a person say and do the extraordinary things he did."

Scott continues: "The studio sessions were tough in some ways, because we were tackling

BIG FINISH ORIGINALS

## CICERO: SERIES ONE



Directed by:  
**SCOTT HANDCOCK**

Written by:  
**DAVID LLEWELLYN**

Starring:  
**SAMUEL BARNETT**  
**GEORGE NAYLOR**

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a 400-plus page script across a single week, so there was a lot of leaping around to make the most of different cast members, and mentally it was quite demanding to keep track of it all.

"But it's always such a joy to work with Sam – we've done quite a lot now at Big Finish, from *Nightshade* to *Torchwood*, with a bit of *Hamlet* thrown in – and we have a shorthand that makes studio days a breeze.

"It was also nice to work more with George Naylor, who nailed (sorry about the pun!) it as Quintus, and just shares such a brilliant dynamic with Sam that they really do feel like brothers. Honestly though, the entire cast were a dream. A few of them expected – because it was a historical drama – that it might be quite stuffy but were then surprised by how fresh and modern the scripts felt, and there's a real life to the performances that you just can't help but get swept up in!

"Everyone who came in instantly got the vibe and felt like part of the family – not least Laura Riseborough as Terentia, who is the perfect match for Sam as Cicero's wife. We all had a lovely night out midway through the

week, and it felt like we'd all known each other for years..."

Scott, who also created another original series, *The Confessions of Dorian Gray*, for Big Finish, added: "It's always fun tackling something different at Big Finish. I love directing scripts that focus on emotion and relationships, as the fun then comes from teasing out the nuances in the dialogue, and it allows for more collaboration between the cast and director. In a sense, because Cicero's a real-life historical story, the plot's already out there.

"All you have to do is use Google and you know how it



Above (l-r): Katherine Pearce and Laura Riseborough

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SCOTT HANDCOCK



Above: George Naylor

ends... so ensuring the listener invests in the characters and their relationships becomes even more important. But it's been great to see everyone come in to this with such enthusiasm. David's been so clever in putting a modern perspective on the classical world, so it's effortless to engage with, and we all just love doing it. And this obviously isn't the end of Cicero's life so there's certainly scope for more... fingers crossed!" **VORTEX**