

*It's easy to list reasons NOT
to produce scripted fiction.*

It's expensive.

It's labor-intensive.

And audio fiction just hasn't had a consistent
track record — at least not in the US.

Why take the risk?





*But what if there was a proven formula
for global success in scripted fiction?*

If that formula was the key to a beautifully-produced podcast with viral storylines attracting the committed fans of true crime and narrative non-fiction hits —

A podcast that didn't only delight, intrigue, and entertain, but brought a community of passionate listeners together, healed divisions, even changed culture —

Wouldn't you invest in it?

What if that investment came with the partnership of the world's premiere producer of audio fiction — a globally-recognized brand that has kept millions of passionate fans listening to its scripted fiction for over seventy years?

That time-tested formula for success in audio fiction DOES exist, and this unprecedented collaboration is available to you and your stakeholders.

THE ARCHERS

At 19,000 episodes and counting, *The Archers* — the world's longest-running audio drama — delivers galvanizing, wildly popular scripted fiction six days a week to millions of listeners on BBC Radio 4 and globally via podcast.

Timed to leverage international press coverage of *The Archers*' 70th anniversary in 2021, the iconic audio drama could be coming to American audiences.



Introducing...

THE ABELS

A soap opera docudrama about the day-to-day life of a normal, yet somehow extraordinary, diverse American community.

A spin-off of BBC Radio 4's scripted fiction serial, *The Archers*, continuously on air since 1951.

The Abels: an unrivaled collaboration between

Talkbox Productions

BBC

And you



TALKBOX
PRODUCTIONS

BBC

A MESSAGE

from the creator

When I discovered the BBC Radio 4 podcast *The Archers* in 2007, I loved it instantly. Listening to the characters as they navigated joys and sorrows, crises and triumphs became a daily joy and a comfort. The audio drama drew me in with natural, conversational voice acting and realistic sound design. It felt as though I was overhearing the characters' real lives unfold, rather than listening to a presentational radio play. I never missed an episode.

In 2013, *The Archers* became personal when its writers began to dramatize the damage to a family and community as a couple's passionate romantic relationship slowly became poisoned by abuse. As I listened to the harrowing events play out, it became impossible to ignore similarities in the relationship of the characters, and the manipulation and control taking place in my own home. The fictionalized story offered me the perspective I needed to face the truth of my own damaged partnership. It helped me find the courage to leave a man I loved but was afraid of.

The story arc also made a measurable impact in Britain. Domestic violence agencies reported significantly higher numbers of calls for help. Charitable giving to those agencies substantially increased. British legislation was even passed to criminalize coercive control.

And not only did *Archers* listeners who had experienced emotional, mental, and physical relationship violence express gratitude to the show for portraying their painful reality, at least one listener called, shaken, to report that he was horrified to recognize his own abusive behavior in the main character, and was seeking counseling.

That is world-changing storytelling.

A MESSAGE

from the creator (continued)

After the story arc concluded, I approached the BBC with a proposal: I wanted to adapt the internationally-acclaimed DV storyline for listeners in the US, not as a stand-alone “inspired by” project, but as a business partnership with the weight of BBC backing.

What followed were several years of communications and meetings at *The Archers*’ recording studios in Birmingham, England and BBC headquarters in London.

The entire creative team at *The Archers*, including producers, writers, directors, editors, and staff generously shared the details of

their writing room process, long-perfected production workflow, and the secrets to their unique sound design — everything I would need to get an American program on its feet and running smoothly.

The time together allowed a close and trusting relationship to develop with key decision-makers from *The Archers* and the BBC.

Over the years, as we got to know each other personally and professionally, the US and the UK experienced increasing political and social chaos that affected *all* our daily lives.

Particularly because of *The Archers*’ historic focus on a breadth of social justice issues, we began to see greater promise in a bigger project: an ongoing scripted fiction spin-off of *The Archers* designed to bring together a polarized American audience.

This was when I stumbled upon research¹ that deeply moved all of us: MacArthur Genius Grant recipient Betsy Levy Paluck’s field studies showed that even in communities as wounded and divided as post-genocide Rwanda, the medium of audio fiction helped opposing factions deepen their tolerance for a variety of viewpoints, and even to resolve difficult communal problems.

A MESSAGE

from the creator (continued)

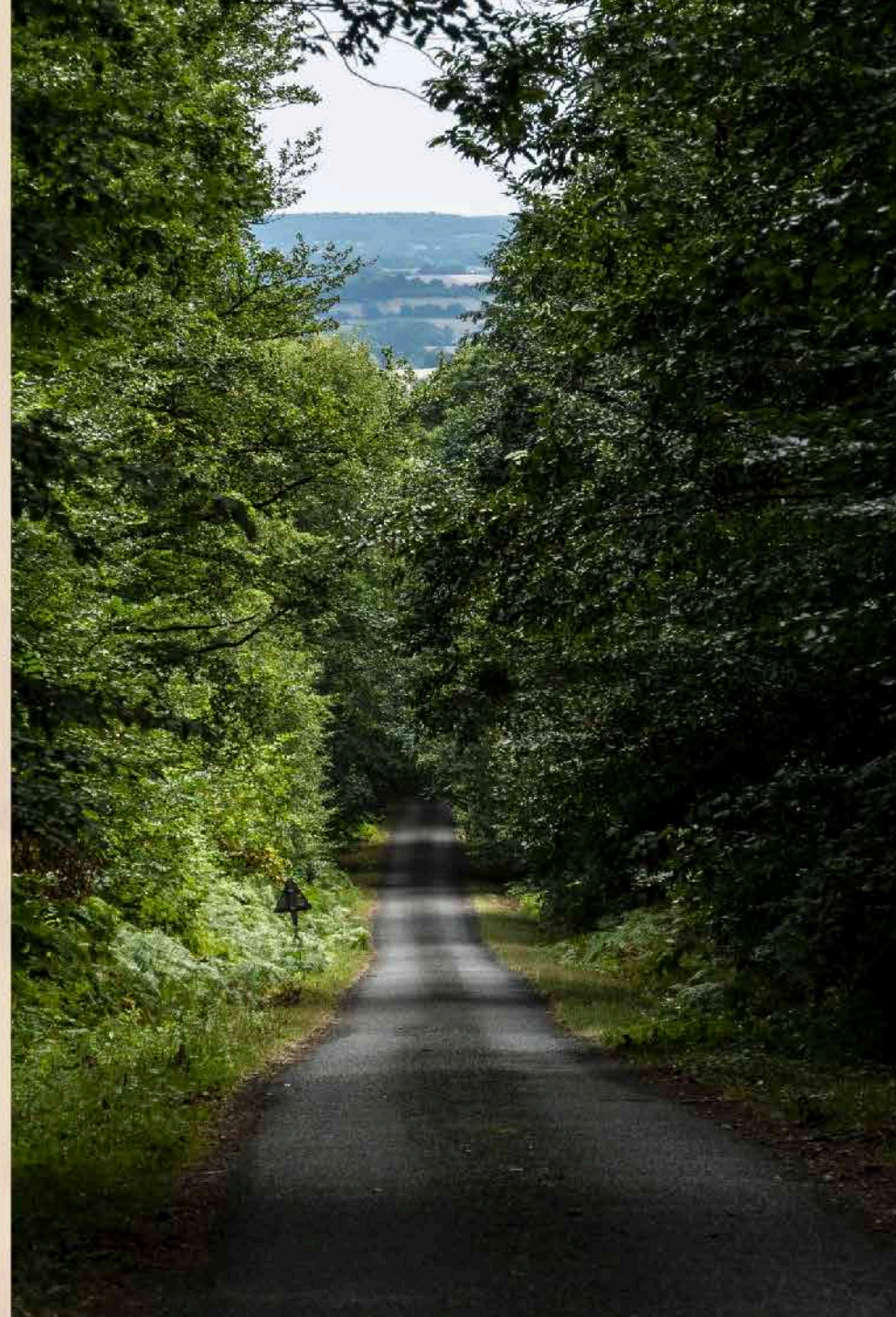
This was a power that *The Archers* creators had intuitively drawn upon at the program's founding and that the show's producers continue to place at the center of its values today.

Understanding that **audio fiction moves polarized listeners toward greater empathy, understanding, and tolerance** transformed my podcast idea into a mission.

I believe that by following *The Archers*' time-tested formula, a spin-off audio drama could become an incubator model for US commercial success in podcast fiction.

Just as important, I believe that by highlighting diverse voices and stories that deepen empathy, *The Abels* can also play a vital role in helping citizens in our fractured United States listen to each other and find common ground and understanding.

I believe this is programming that America needs.



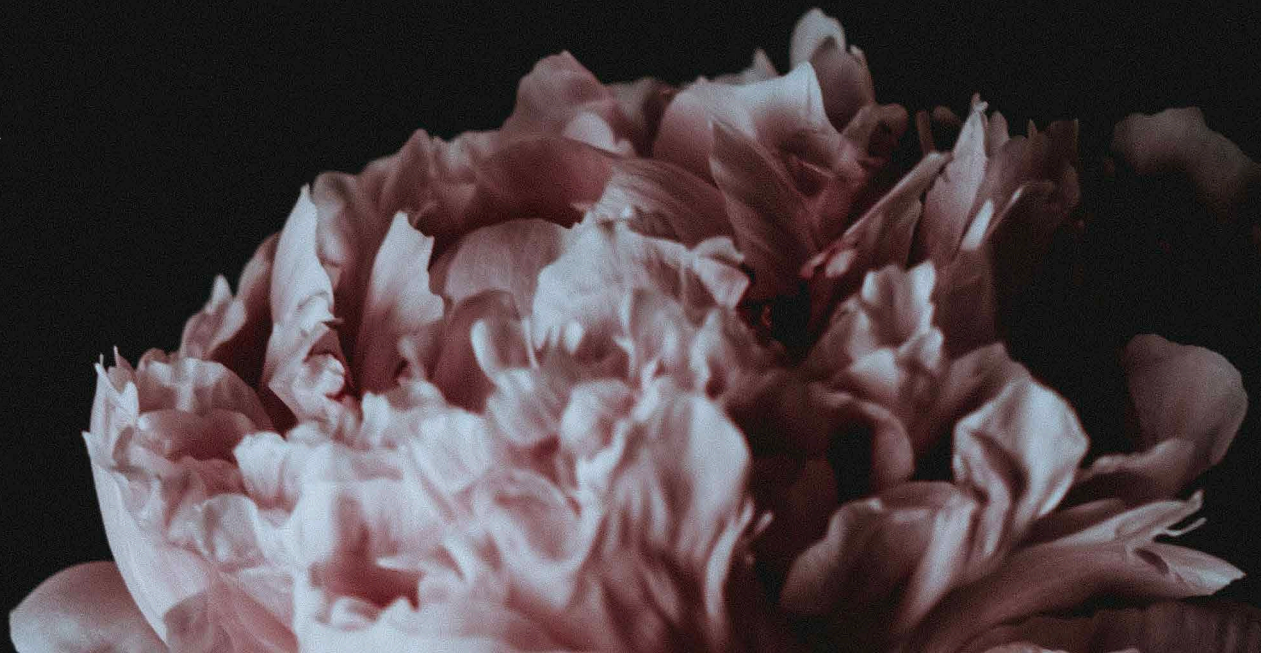
LET'S MAKE WORK THAT CHANGES THE WORLD

The biggest players in the US podcast market already recognize the commercial potential in audio fiction, and other daily soap opera podcasts are in development.

But only Talkbox Productions holds the rights to leverage the BBC brand, tap into BBC Radio 4's extensive production resources, and launch an *Archers* spin-off.

Together, Talkbox Productions and the BBC seek purpose-driven collaborators: partners who have the resources, the reach, and the vision to offer US listeners a program that is not only captivating and wildly entertaining, but one that uniquely makes a difference in the lives and communities of its listeners.

With the best creative, marketing, and distribution teams in place, along with my partners at the BBC, I am confident that *The Abels* has the potential to take center stage in the American audio market, and just like its inspiration, rise to the top, offering beloved, transformative storytelling for generations to come.





THE BBC'S SUPPORT FOR THE ABELS



“When Tavia Gilbert approached me with the idea of adapting *The Archers*, an icon of British radio, for an American audience, I wondered why no one had ever thought of it before.

The renaissance of audio fiction in the US through podcasting is the perfect moment to realise her vision and to create a brand new classic soap opera with both storytelling and a social conscience at its core.

In the UK the response to the Rob & Helen story of coercive control was overwhelming and told us on the production team that it was clearly a story that demanded telling, and we know there are many other social issues for which continuing drama is an effective vehicle.

The combination of Tavia’s professional expertise and personal experience and connection to the original story make her the ideal creative mind for this project.”

— ALISON HINDELL, *BBC Radio 4’s Commissioning Editor for Drama and Fiction*

[Listen to fan reactions to *The Archers*](#)

[Listen to fan reactions to the Rob & Helen storyline](#)

THE IMPACT OF THE ARCHERS' DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STORYLINE

“...this storyline has saved lives.”

BBC NEWS MAGAZINE

“The Archers: What effect has the Rob and Helen story had?”

“This storyline...has hit an emotional seam with women (and men) all over the country.”

THE TELEGRAPH

“The Chilling Domestic Abuse on The Archers is More Than Just a Radio Storyline.”

“The program...is cited as the reason for a 17% annual increase in calls to Britain’s national domestic violence helpline.”

TIME MAGAZINE

“How a Radio Soap Got a Whole Country Talking About Domestic Abuse.”

“[Audio] is a wonderful medium for sensitive, nuanced storytelling like this.”

THE GUARDIAN

“Domestic Abuse in The Archers – How the Radio Show is Helping Women Spot the Signs.”

“Charities...have credited the “Archers effect” with helping to raise awareness.”

NEWSWEEK

“How U.K. Radio Show ‘The Archers’ Sparked Record-Breaking Donations For Domestic Abuse Victims.”

“...She only realised she had been in a controlling relationship when she listened to the BBC Radio 4 serial.”

BBC NEWS MAGAZINE

“The Archers Made Me Realise I was a Victim of Domestic Abuse.”

Archers becomes 'smash hit of digital age'

THE TELEGRAPH

Ratings boosted 42% • Facebook fans nearly doubled • More than 1 million new listening fans added
A significantly younger, new generation of listeners tuned into the slow-burning Rob & Helen storyline

“Our audience team’s latest data shows the programme has achieved its highest ever level of listener appreciation.”

— TONY HALL, *Then-BBC Director General*

DATA FROM APRIL 2016

“In the 1950s, the programme’s original editor observed that the success of the programme lay in the fact that they’d made *The Archers* addictive; it’s gratifying to feel that we’re still achieving the same compulsive, addictive effect in the competitive world of new media.”

— SEAN O’CONNOR, *Then-Editor of The Archers*

THE ARCHERS' HISTORIED FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The Archers premiered in post World War II England during a time of political and social upheaval, when citizens were emerging from an apocalyptic, doomsday feeling in the country.²

Into this post-war world entered *The Archers*, bringing with it a glimpse of a way of life that was colored with hope.

The Archers was an immediate hit, and seven decades later, the audio drama is still recognized world-wide as a national crown jewel, and an essential part of the British way of life — an enviable position for any scripted fiction serial.

Not only is it a beloved cultural touchstone in the UK, the program still **achieves an astonishing 260M listens annually.**³

By first introducing a new character on *The Archers* before establishing them in the world of *The Abels*, that massive UK fan following can be strategically leveraged, priming an eager listening audience to follow a new spin-off podcast from its very first episodes.

Four key elements have made up the formula to *The Archers*' unparalleled 70-year success:

- Female-focused storylines centered in real-world social issues that appeal to a multicultural audience;
- A diverse, non-celebrity, multigenerational cast of longtime characters;
- Cinematic, real-world sound design with a real-time/real-life pace of daily episodes; and
- A carefully-cultivated relationship with its listening fans.

When COVID-19 hit, *The Archers* adapted its historic in-person group workflow, moving actors to home recording setups for the first time in its history, while sustaining the naturalness of dialogue and their unique sound design.

Though the team has returned to the recording studios, using newly-distanced processes, their adaptable workflow is another key to ongoing success.



THE WORLD

of The Abels

The Abels' premier episode and its first central story arc will appeal to American listeners' affinity for true crime podcasts.

In current day and in flashback, the audience will follow the romantic relationship of a couple that listeners initially love to love, until their once-happy union is destroyed by coercive control. Our way into their story is through the perspective of a defense attorney.



Case notes. Tuesday the 4th.
10:30 am. Just met my new client.

Late 30's, early 40's. Mother of
a teenage son. Educated. White.
Middle-class.

According to the lead detective,
the woman in custody is also a
"MILF," or so I overheard him
say. I'm certain that comment
wasn't meant for my ears, but
it's high praise for a woman
who's 38 weeks pregnant.

Her father reached me early this
morning, begged for my help,
said he'd find a way to pay –
whatever the cost.

Before the detective – the guy
always has a toothpick sticking
out of his mouth and swaggers,
like he's got everything already
figured out – took me into the
interrogation room, he warned me
that I'd find my client covered
in blood.

Makes sense, since she was taken
into custody after shooting her
husband just a few hours ago in
their kitchen. Husband's
apparently in emergency surgery
now, so this isn't a murder
case.

Not yet, anyway.

I'll send you a link to the full
recording of our interview, but
don't hold your breath. While she
says next to nothing, she did
admit she's guilty – she did it.

So, should be end of story, right?

Could save me a lot of time and
trouble to take her at face value.

But for some reason... I'm not so
sure. **Something tells me there's...
a lot more going on.**

Thus we begin the *The Abels* soap opera podcast, which first dives into the timely subject of guilt and innocence. And of course, the answer to the central question — Is this woman guilty? — will be far more complicated than anyone could ever imagine.

Beginning a series adaptation with an evocative story that taps into the mind-bending of gaslighting and coercive control represents only the jumping off point for the narratives *The Abels* will courageously explore.

With storylines ripped from the headlines, *The Abels* will highlight contemporary pressure points such as domestic terrorism, racism, class warfare, and the very nature of truth and lies.

But the strength and appeal of the podcast will be balancing stories of everyday joys against the backdrop of serious issues, offering space for storylines that feature American experiences as light-hearted, playful, and joyful as those that inspire serious conversation.

COMPARABLE PROGRAMMING

The Abels' editorial values and point of view will highlight:

Evocative music that underscores honest family pathos and vulnerability

THIS IS US

Slow-burn, docudrama narratives that feature diverse, authentic characters and communities

THE WIRE

Exceptional voice acting in a natural, conversational style, with real-world, cinematic sound design

HOMECOMING

Moving story arcs that bring together diverse characters of every age and class, with no throughline or loyalty lost even if beloved characters transition off the program

CALL THE MIDWIFE

Gripping subject matter inspired by high-stakes, true events

SERIAL

Cohesive throughlines while playing across a variety of tones — from comic to tragic

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

Lightheartedness, tenderness, and the thoughtful cultivation of a passionate fanbase with listeners who hear their own truths reflected

SCHITT'S CREEK



CREATIVE TEAM



**TAVIA
GILBERT**
Creator

Spoken word Grammy nominee, Audiobook Narrator of the Year, and winner of the Best Female Narrator Audie Award Tavia Gilbert is an actor, singer, and narrator of over 700 full-cast and multi-voice audiobooks. She is an award-winning writer and producer of multiple non-fiction podcasts for an international audience, with programs focused on civics, philosophy and faith, science and technology, and leadership. She is a 12-time nominee and three-time winner of the Audie Award, a three-time nominee and one-time winner of the Voice Arts Awards, and the recipient of dozens of Earphones Awards, a ListenUp Award, three Parent's Choice awards, two Marcom Awards, and an AVA Digital Award. She studied Radio Documentary at the Salt Institute, Acting at Cornish College of the Arts (BFA), and Creative Nonfiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts (MFA), where she is a faculty member.



**ALISON
HINDELL**
Executive Producer

Alison Hindell is Radio 4's commissioning editor for Drama and Fiction. Hindell joined the BBC in 1988 from the Royal Shakespeare Company and was subsequently appointed Head of Audio Drama in 2005, directing more than 270 radio dramas and overseeing the creation of over 400 hours of drama per year across BBC Radio Networks, from *The Archers* to new writing and classic literature. Hindell's own productions include the 2003 commemorative making of *Under Milk Wood*, and she has won awards for her productions including the Sony Gold, The Writers' Guild Award, The Richard Imison Award and a Gold Medal at the New York Radio Festival. She began her production career in BBC Wales where she has made the majority of her productions.



**MIRANDA
FLEMING**
Digital Strategist

Miranda Fleming produced award-winning shorts and features before moving into the digital space and is now a leading expert in fan and audience digital engagement. She was Head of UK Film for Indiegogo 2014-2015 before founding her company Fanslike Agency. Clients include Universal Pictures and BFI.

CREATIVE TEAM

(continued)

BRYAN BARNEY

Sound Supervisor

Bryan Barney is the Executive Producer of Audiobooks for Blackstone Publishing, the largest independent publisher in the multi-billion dollar audiobook business. A native of Massachusetts, he received a BA in Audio Post-Production and Sound Design from Emerson College. He has over a decade of experience in the audio industry, with a diverse background that includes live sound, music, audio for television and film, and special expertise in audio dramatizations and audiobooks. Bryan is an active member of The Recording Academy and the Audio Engineering Society.

JEREMY HOWE

The Archers' Editor

Jeremy Howe is the Editor of *The Archers* on BBC Radio 4. Prior to that he was the Commissioning Editor for Drama and Fiction at Radio 4 launching shows like *Tumanbay*, *Passenger List*, *Tracks*, *The Complete Smiley* and *Pilgrim*. He came to Radio 4 from television where he executive produced docs, single dramas and 10x10 New Directors strand for BBC 2, launching the directing careers of talent like Joe Wright, Andrea Arnold & Sarah Gavron.

ANDY PARTINGTON

Sound Advisor

Andy Partington is a UK-based freelance Sound Designer and Mixer. During a 23-year career in the BBC, he worked across a variety of programme genres including Radio Drama and *The Archers*, Music, and Non-Fiction. In 2005, Andy joined the BBC Asian Network's radio soap *Silver Street* as its full-time technical lead, recording and mixing over a thousand episodes. Since 2013 he has run his own sound production business and worked on audio plays for a variety of clients, as well as returning regularly to the BBC to work on *The Archers*. For the last five years, he has been the most regular mixer on the show, and in March 2020 was asked to head the technical effort to keep the programme on air during COVID-19 lockdown conditions, adding extensive knowledge of the challenges of remote recording to his previous expertise in studio and location sound.

CITATIONS

ARTICLES

1. <https://isps.yale.edu/sites/default/files/publication/2012/12/ISPS09-024.pdf>
2. Program history from Forever Ambridge: Twenty-five Years of The Archers (1975), by Norman Painting, founding cast member.
3. Consistent annual listenership as measured just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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TALKBOX

PRODUCTIONS



A TALKBOX PRODUCTIONS PROJECT | IN COLLABORATION WITH THE BBC