

THE ARCHERS

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

Not only is *The Archers* beloved in the UK and beyond, achieving more than 270 million listens annually, for decades its storylines have been powerful drivers of cultural change.

The biggest players in the US podcast market recognize the untapped commercial potential in audio fiction and are beginning to develop similar competing content. But only Talkbox holds the rights to leverage the BBC brand, tap into their extensive production resources, and launch an *Archers* spin-off with social justice at its heart.



Introducing...

THE ABELS

An entertaining docufiction that explores stories ripped from today's headlines.

A spin-off of BBC Radio 4's scripted fiction serial, *The Archers*, with bold new storylines centering People of Color and Gen Z and appealing to multigenerational listeners.

The Abels: an unrivaled collaboration between

Talkbox Productions, BBC,
And you

TALKBOX
PRODUCTIONS

BBC



THE ABELS TIMELINE

The Abels will capture its audience with premium production quality and by connecting with listeners' desire for authenticity.

An exceptional head writer and an expert production team are essential to *The Abels*' strategy.

With the best writing and producing team in place, the timeline for project greenlight to distribution is nine months.

PRE-PRODUCTION

9 months to Series Premiere

Writing & casting
Staffing & production workflows
Marketing & PR planning
Partnership development

PRODUCTION

3-6 months to Series Premiere

Audio production
Audience-building campaigns launch:
Digital & traditional media
Ad placement
Impact campaign
Archers integration

SERIES LAUNCH

Initial 30-episode drop with a cliffhanger
Continuing audience-building campaigns
PR strategy launch

A MESSAGE

from the creator

Throughout its 70-plus-year run, amidst storylines intended to delight and entertain, *The Archers* has explored timely, complex social issues, including mental health, substance abuse, sex and relationship, climate, financial insecurity, assault and abuse, and more. These stories have moved listeners toward empathy, understanding, and action. **That is the unique power of fiction.**

As soon as I discovered BBC Radio 4's *The Archers* in 2007, I became an avid, daily listener. In 2013, the podcast became personal when it embarked on a slow-burn story arc dramatizing coercive control and domestic violence. As I listened, it became

impossible to ignore similarities in my own relationship. In fact, the story helped me find the courage to leave a man I loved but was afraid of.

The Rob & Helen storyline made a measurable impact in Britain. Listeners who had experienced relationship violence expressed gratitude to the show, and at least one listener called 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, and I want to bring it to a US audience.

By following *The Archers*' time-tested formula and updating it for a modern audience, a spin-off audio drama, *The Abels*, can play a vital role in helping citizens in our fractured United States listen to each other and find common ground.

This is the kind of scripted fiction programming that America needs, but it's not just altruism. Stories that matter will attract larger audiences and keep them interested longer. In other words, it's good business.

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

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

It is good business to have a story that saves lives.

“...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.”

“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

“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.”

WHAT IS UNIQUE AND COMPELLING ABOUT THE ABELS

FOR MORE THAN 70 YEARS, THE ARCHERS HAS APPEALED TO AUDIENCES WITH:

- Stories that do not demand an audience suspend disbelief, but reflect listeners' lived experiences
- 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
- A carefully-cultivated relationship with its listening fans

BUILDING ON THAT SUCCESS, THE ABELS WILL:

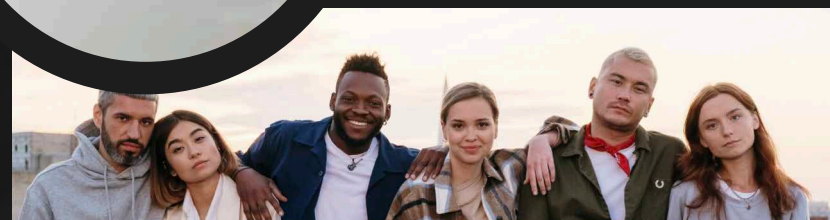
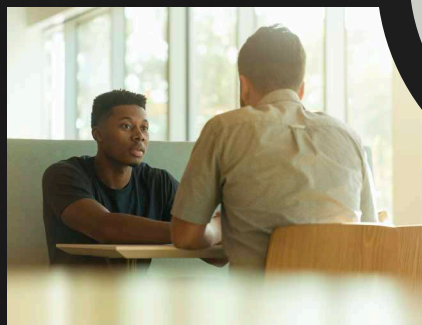
- Appeal particularly to listeners ages 18-34
- Emphasize storylines of historically marginalized people, e.g., women, BIPOC, etc.
- Create a powerful feedback loop between today's headlines and cross-promoted fiction
 - Exploring difficult but timely themes such as domestic violence, race relations, and police brutality in collaboration with subject matter experts
 - Presenting, without preaching, moral and ethical complexity in narratives that allow an audience to reflect
- Prioritize plot and character development with a supporting, gentle real-world sound design
- Highlight multi-generational, professional voice actors
- Connect storylines back to a central cast grounded in a familiar place that brings the listener home

THE WORLD

of The Abels

The Abels' premier episode and its first central story arc will appeal to American listeners' passion 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 stories 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. Plots based on true stories will appeal to listeners who value not only entertainment, but truth and authenticity.

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 has narrated over 700 audiobooks and is the award-winning writer and producer of multiple non-fiction podcasts for an international audience. 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).

BRYAN BARNEY

Sound Supervisor

Bryan Barney is the Executive Producer of Audiobooks for Blackstone Publishing. He received a BA in Audio Post-Production and Sound Design from Emerson College and 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.

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.

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. He came to Radio 4 from television, where he executive produced docs, single dramas and 10x10 New Directors strand for BBC 2.

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.

ANDY PARTINGTON

Sound Advisor

Andy Partington is a 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*, where for the last five years, he has been the most regular mixer. He was asked to head the technical effort to keep *The Archers* on air during COVID-19 lockdown conditions, adding extensive knowledge of remote recording to his previous expertise in studio and location sound.

CITATIONS

PHOTOGRAPHY

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Uildriks, Frederike J.
Wikimedia Commons.

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PRODUCTIONS



A TALKBOX PRODUCTIONS PROJECT | IN COLLABORATION WITH THE BBC