Writing For Your Ears:  
The Art of Creating Fictional Podcasts and Audio Dramas

SUMMARY:  
Audio fiction is both white-hot (many of today's 500,000+ podcasts are fictional gems) and steeped in tradition ("War of the Worlds" just turned 80!). Using text and audio examples, we'll share intel about working in this skyrocketing medium: how does one write stories that demand to be heard? How is scripting a serialized podcast distinct from writing a 1930s radio play... or a Netflix TV show? How can sound and music support or nuance text? How do these projects get pitched, bought, and produced?

WHAT'S UP WITH THIS OUTLINE:  
As you can tell, we like to ask questions... and we'd love you to ask them, too! We’re going to leave ample room for a Q&A at the end of this panel. At this early stage of panel-planning, we figured it might be helpful to include a list of questions we’ll be digging into, so that you can see if you’re interested in attending the panel. Below these, you’ll find presenter bios and also a list of some seminal audio dramas, which A) we think you’ll enjoy, and B) might inform some of your questions about this medium.

SOME QUESTIONS THE PANELISTS WILL TACKLE:  
- How is writing for audio different than writing something purely textual or visual... for instance: a novel, or poem, or a musical for the stage?

- What’s the creative journey of an audio story -- from idea to page to recording, etc? What parts of the process especially inspire you... or frustrate you?

- What are the perks/pitfalls of scoring and sound design? These are luxuries that novelists don’t have...

- How do you conceive of the audience for your work? Where do you picture someone listening to it? (We’re not writing for folks in a darkened theater or a living room, necessarily...) How can fictional podcasts best reach and represent underserved people?

- What advice do you wish you’d heard when you were first working in audio fiction? How might a fledgling audio storyteller get started in the medium (DIY, internships, podcasting/radio routes, etc)?

- What sort of business infrastructure is there for audio storytelling? How do these stories get pitched, bought and developed? What excites you most about where our industry is headed?
**AUDIO FICTION RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Moderator Jackson here. I’m first recommending that you check out the awesome, eclectic work of our panelists! That includes: the insanely charming musical *36 Questions*, the fantastical and winning YA anthology *Flyest Fables*, the wring-your-heart-out love story *The Shadows*, and the eerie conspiracy tale *Limetown*.

- There are so many other audio stories worth evangelizing! Here are five to start:
  
  - Before it was a TV show starring Julia Roberts, *Homecoming* was a groundbreaking fictional podcast with mesmerizing lead performances from Catherine Keener and Oscar Isaac. It dives into about a mysterious rehabilitation program for military veterans.
  
  - For comic book fans -- check out the ominous, evocative soundscaping in the *Wolverine: The Long Night*, a new tale about our clawed vigilante in the Alaskan wilds.
  
  - Lauren Shippen’s *The Bright Sessions* lets us be flies on the wall of the strangest therapy sessions you’ve ever heard: each patient is a teen with supernatural, um, “difficulties.”
  
  - Before she became a national name with HBO’s *Insecure*, Issa Rae and her production company launched the podcast *Fruit*-- a thoughtful portrait of a black NFL player coming to terms with his homosexuality... and potentially risking his career.
  
  - *The Truth* is a collection of vastly varied fictional stories overseen by Jonathan Mitchell, one of the godfathers of this medium. Listening to it is almost like experiencing a *Best American Short Stories 2019* in audio form.

**PRESENTER BIOS**

- **Morgan Givens** is a storyteller and writer who’s been featured on NPRs *Invisibilia*, Story District’s *Top Shelf* and The Moth Mainstage. He’s also the creator of the critically acclaimed and award-winning podcast *Flyest Fables* and is a graduate of the Transom Storytelling Workshop. [MorganGivens.com](http://www.MorganGivens.com)

- **Ellen Winter** is a performer, writer, and composer based in Brooklyn, NY. In 2017, she co-wrote, directed and composed the podcast musical, *36 Questions*, produced by Two-Up. She’s also a songwriter for Gimlet’s *Story Pirates* podcast. Currently in post-production for her debut album: *Every Feeling*.

- **Chris Littler** is a writer, composer, and director best known for co-writing and co-directing the podcast musical *36 Questions* with his writing partner, Ellen Winter. He was a senior writer for
both seasons of the Limetown podcast and wrote an episode of the upcoming Limetown adaptation for Facebook Watch.

- **Kaitlin Prest**'s work in podcasting, performance and installation has been featured at audio festivals and conferences around the world. She is the founder, creative director and host of Radiotopia’s The Heart, where she explores intimacy through innovative approaches to sound and storytelling. Her recent The Shadows tells a semi-fictional love story from several perspectives, including a sweater’s.

- **Jackson Musker (moderator/organizer)** writes and produces all things audio: fiction and non-. For nearly a decade, he produced public radio's national culture show The Dinner Party Download. His words, sounds, and stories have also graced NPR's Weekend Edition, The California Report, and LA's public affairs show Off-Ramp.