



INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER

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IP FEATURE

A Cast of Hundreds

Audiobook of the Year Award Finalists Feature Elaborate Productions and Celebrity Readers

by Jim Barnes

“Heard any good books lately?” It’s a phrase you hear more and more these days, as audiobooks have gotten easier to use, better produced, and more creatively “read.” I listen to a lot of them during my 30-minute commute, and have come to appreciate the huge potential of a great book coupled with a great production. Listening to Nick Hornby’s *A Long Way Down* was akin to a stage play by the three actors who perform the book’s varied characters, and enhanced the differences in their ages, class and politics.

The late, great Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five* gets an inspired reading by Ethan Hawke, but it’s the extra interview with Vonnegut that’s the real treat. He even reads a chapter himself, set to jazz music. Especially in light of Vonnegut’s recent death, the recording is a real treasure.

It’s not surprising that when the [Audio Publishers Association \(APA\)](#) announced its four finalists for the prestigious Audiobook of the Year Award, they included some very elaborate productions: one utilizes a cast of over 200 prominent African American readers; one features historic recordings of luminaries like Carl Sandburg, Helen Keller, and Eleanor Roosevelt; another is staged by a cast of Hollywood actors including Alan Alda and John Turturro.

The four titles selected as finalists are: *Inspired by...The Bible Experience: New Testament*, Zondervan Publishing; *This I Believe*, Audio Renaissance; *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Caedmon; and *World War Z*, Random House Audio. The Award is to be presented at The Audies® awards ceremony on June 1 at The Rainbow Room in New York City.

The trend toward more elaborate audio productions is growing, says APA president Michele Cobb. “Last year’s Audiobook of the Year winner – *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy Tertiary Phase* was a multi-voiced title and it’s certainly interesting that this year three out of the four nominees involve multiple narrators. The use of multi-cast recordings, often with sound effects and music, expands upon the traditions of radio and theatre performances and seems to be on the rise in our marketplace.”

“While multi-cast recordings may have been a larger portion of the titles produced by independent publishers, we’re seeing publishers of all sizes explore this avenue of performance with a wide range of titles. Publishers can expand into new directions of accomplishment and interaction when creating full cast listening experiences.”

The Audies®, considered the “Oscars” of the audio publishing industry, will present awards in 31 categories this year. The prestigious Audiobook of the Year award gives special recognition to the audiobook with the greatest impact on the audio publishing industry and is judged on criteria including marketing campaign excellence and sales achievement.

“Audio publishing continues to grow and attract more listeners,” says Cobb. “Accessibility of listening options both in format and experience build upon the strength of the industry. We, of course, are always interested in getting more people to try audiobooks, since once someone tries an audiobook they often become a repeat customer. Our 2006 consumer survey showed that the narrator was one of the most important factors in selecting an audiobook. Having multiple narrators also means potentially more reasons to try a particular title, as well as providing a unique encounter for the ears.”

What effect will it have on the judges? Their comments on the finalists are as follows:

Inspired By...The Bible Experience: New Testament, Zondervan Publishing
Narrated by a Full Cast, including Angela Bassett, Cuba Gooding Jr., Samuel L. Jackson, Blair Underwood and Denzel Washington
Producers: Ron Belk, Kyle Bowser, Lou “Buster” Brown, Robi Reed and Chip Hurd
Directors: Chip Hurd, Mark Swinton, Wren T. Brown, Lou “Buster” Brown, and Andi Chapman

“*The Bible Experience* is a tribute to innovative marketing. Packed with an impressive cast of over 200 prominent African Americans – including Alfre Woodard, Samuel L. Jackson, Blair Underwood, Denzel Washington and Angela Bassett – Zondervan didn’t stop at letting the talent attract listeners. They conducted a church-driven awareness program, utilized MySpace as a promotional vehicle, and received a wealth of positive press for this superb production.”

This I Believe, Audio Renaissance
Edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman
Narrated by various contributors, including Bill Gates, Martha Graham, Isabel Allende, Jackie Robinson, Carl Sandburg and Eleanor Roosevelt
Producers: Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with Emily Botein, John Gregory and Viki Merrick

“Audio Renaissance’s *This I Believe* captures the on-going history of the American people. Adapted from the NPR special series, men and women express in their own voices the core beliefs by which they live. Essays from the original Edward R. Murrow radio series from the 1950s – including those spoken by Jackie Robinson, Helen Keller, and Eleanor Roosevelt – intermingle with the thoughts of contemporaries, both famous and ordinary, to provide an insightful look at the spirit that continues to drive us.”

To Kill a Mockingbird, Caedmon
By Harper Lee
Narrated by Sissy Spacek
Producer and Director: Rick Harris

“*To Kill a Mockingbird* was one of the most-requested yet unavailable audiobooks – until this past year. Author Harper Lee personally approved the fine performance of Sissy Spacek, who deftly gives voice to this Pulitzer Prize-winning story of racial tension in a small southern town. Now in its fifth printing, and featuring the novel’s original 1960 artwork, the audiobook’s strong sales are a testament to customer demand and Caedmon’s great media outreach, including ample coverage in *People*, *Entertainment Weekly* and *Variety*.”

World War Z, Random House Audio
By Max Brooks
Narrated by Max Brooks and a Full Cast, including Alan Alda, Mark Hamill, Carl Reiner, Henry Rollins, and John Turturro
Producers: John McElroy and Dan Zitt

Director: John McElroy

“An oral history of the fictitious zombie wars has been preserved by Max Brooks in *World War Z*. The audio features a full cast that includes Hollywood luminaries Alan Alda, John Turturro and Rob Reiner; each of the novel’s characters offers up first-hand experiences of those apocalyptic years. Random House kicked off promotion of the program at Comic Con, offered web samples of the variety of narrators, and targeted thousands of Zombie fans with emails and web-based promotions.”

Stay tuned for complete results of the Audies®.